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S. GERALD'S NIECE.

Part X.

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MRS. GERALD'S NIECE.

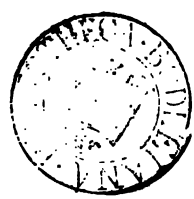
BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON,

AUTHOR OF "TOO STRANGE NOT TO BE TRUE, ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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PART I.

PART I.

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PART I.

MRS. GERALD'S NIECE.

Part I.

CHAPTER I.

"YES, is it not a pretty place?" Annie Derwent said as she and her visitors, the two Miss Conways, were returning from a walk in Holmwood Park on a beautiful evening early in July. This was said in answer to Eliza Conway's remark that she had never seen such beautiful scenery. There was greater truth in this assertion than is often the case with these sort of exclamations, for she and her sister lived almost all the year round in London, and only went in the autumn for a few weeks to the seaside. Their father, a hard-working lawyer, cared chiefly

for fresh air and boating during the short time he devoted to health and relaxation; and their mother, a great invalid, could not bear a long journey. They had, therefore, seen little or nothing of the beauties of English scenery, and had never been abroad.

Holmwood House was a pleasant, old-fashioned, country place in one of the most picturesque counties of England. It had been in former times a monastery, but not much of the original building remained. What were now the offices were said to have belonged to the original conventual pile. The grey stone walls of the kitchen-garden and an old archway overgrown with ivy and bearing the fragments of a Latin inscription, were likewise supposed to be remnants of the ancient enclosure. The present house dated from the reign of James I. Successive additions had been made to it which were not all improvements; but whatever faults it possessed in an architectural point of view were disguised by the abundance of creepers which covered its walls. On the southern side especially, pink, white, yellow, and red roses, pomegranates, and myrtles, passion-

flowers and jessamine climbed up to the second storey, invading and wreathing with their blossoms the framework of the windows, peeping into the sunny rooms, and mingling their delicate shoots with the stout branches of the Westeria, which in spring clothed the whole of the front and western side of the house with its luxuriant lilac clusters. The garden, too, was one bright mass of colours, not a mere flowery patchwork of various hues, laid out in a systematic manner, but a charming combination of flowers, such as Perdita might have woven, or Ariel couched in—

> "Merrily, merrily,
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

This blooming maze occupied the whole space between one side of the house, and a low moss-grown wall which separated it from the churchyard—one of those old-fashioned burial places full of tall trees and waving grass, and daisies innumerable growing on the nameless graves of obscure villagers, and white roses and clematis adorning the tombstones of the more honoured, if not more

honourable, occupants of the consecrated ground. On the opposite side a smooth, green lawn extended to the edge of a grove of ash-trees, and a hill, covered partly with wood and partly with gorse, rose behind the house. Before it flowed a rapid and transparent stream, in which many a speckled trout and careless minnow courted its doom. The constant sound of rippling water was one of the charms of the place. It was like its own peculiar music in the ears of those who loved it. Little diminutive brooks wended their way through the park, the shrubbery, and the grove, singing their songs of joy under the bushes, across the lawn, amongst the flowers. Though sheltered by its woods and secluded in its own grounds, Holmwood had also glimpses of distant country. Through the branches of the grove, where it was thinned, and straight away in front of the house, was to be seen, in the midst of a wide extent of pasture-land and corn-fields, the spire of Ashdown Church, and farther on a broad river bearing on its bosom black barges which looked in the distance like flies on a mirror. A ridge of blue looking

hills, over which a heavy mass of clouds generally rested, was discernible towards the west; and by certain lights, especially when the sky was stormy, the sea could be perceived lining the horizon with a silvery thread or a dark-blue ribbon.

The whole of this fair scene was gilded by the rays of the setting sun, when the three girls reached the steps in front of the house, and turned back to give a last look to the illuminated landscape and the sky tinged by fiery and rosy-coloured clouds. What need is there to dwell on what every one has felt, the delight of the first evening in the country after months spent in a town? Who does not know that delightful sensation? Even those whose lot is by their own choice cast in that great huge London, so forcibly described by a modern writer as "That monster which looks so unmanageable and is so awfully wicked, so hopelessly magnificent, so heretically wise and proud after its own fashion, and yet after a fashion so good also! Such a multitudinous remnant in it who have never bowed the knee to Baal. Such numbers seeking their way to the light; so much

secret holiness, such supernatural lives, such loyalty, mercy, sacrifice, sweetness, and greatness." Yes, even they who love it with all its miseries, and who would not willingly live many days out of the year far from the great City, the mighty pulse of which seems to throb in their own hearts, they know the joy of leaving it behind for a time. More than others, perhaps, they appreciate the luxury of the silence which seems only the more deep for the low twitter of the birds amongst the leaves, or the drowsy hum of the bees over the flower-beds. With more or less of gladness or of melancholy, of hope or of *souvenance*, that beautiful old French word, according as life, and age, and God have dealt with their souls, they gaze on the shadows lengthening on the dewy grass, and listen to the night wind whispering among the branches. It would be difficult to say which is sweetest at that hour—the young man's vision or the old man's dream.

We who are old remember the gradual manner in which the sense of this agreeable change used to steal upon us in days of yore, as we passed from the streets into the

suburb, where the houses, standing wider and wider apart, admitted glimpses of green fields and hedges, till at last the high road was reached, and the fragrance of the air gave token that we were really getting into the country. How welcome was the sight of the little roadside inn, where we stopped to change horses—the picturesque gable-ended cottage-like hostelry, with its tiny garden and large spreading tree. And then, after perhaps three or four days' journey, came the longed-for arrival, the glad revisiting of favourite haunts, the sunset hour, the quiet stroll, the falling asleep that first night lulled by the profound stillness, one of Nature's greatest charms; and yet Charles Lamb, the London poet, fled from Wordsworth's house, in Westmoreland, scared by the silence of those mountainous regions. He could not rest far from the murmurs of the great City.

Now that a few hours will take us to the furthest part of England, the transition is more striking still. The noise of the streets has scarcely died away in our ears, when we find ourselves in the midst of pure air, rural

scenery, and sylvan shades. A newspaper or a doze have filled up the time, and we seem scarcely to have left behind the bustle of the London station before we are landed in the depths of country retirement. But the exquisite pleasure of the contrast is seldom purchased nowadays by an uninterrupted residence of many months in town. Eliza and Jane Conway, however, had bought their enjoyment at that price, and thoroughly appreciated the change.

"It seems so strange, Annie," Jane exclaimed, "that this wonderfully beautiful place should be your own—your very own, as children say."

"And those woods and fields, and that pretty little village, does it also belong to you?" Eliza Conway asked.

"Almost all you see from here is my property," Annie replied; "one or two of the cottages in Holme are Mr. Hendon's; he is our nearest neighbour."

"What an immense responsibility it is for a young girl like you to possess such a property."

"But I do not, of course, manage it

myself; Aunt Gerald does all the business with the trustees and agents."

"But it will not always be so?"

"No, not when I am of age, I suppose. It amuses me to see that the gardener begins to inquire what flowers I wish to have in the beds, and the housekeeper actually asked me this morning which rooms she was to get ready for you. I think my aunt had told her to do so. If you are not comfortable you must complain of me, you see."

"We will complain *to* you in that case," Eliza answered, smiling; "but from what I saw of them before I came out, there is not much chance of our being discontented, I think."

"Oh, no, they are quite charming," Jane added.

"Come this way," Annie said, "I want to get some flowers. Do you not like wearing natural flowers in your hair in the country?" And she led the way to the conservatory, where, somewhat to the dismay of the old gardener, who was watering the plants, she gathered a handful of red and

white camelias, which she gave to her friends.

"You have not kept any for yourself," Eliza said.

"Yes, this white one," Annie replied; "I have so much hair that I can only wear in it one little sprig or flower."

"It is really very hard in these days," Eliza said, laughing, "for those who have a great deal of hair of their own. Nobody gives them credit for it."

"Don't you believe in mine?" Annie exclaimed. "Look." She took off her bonnet and comb, and masses of jet black hair fell on her shoulders and half-way down her back.

"Indeed, I believed in yours without this ocular demonstration," Eliza answered. "I knew you well enough to feel sure that you would not wear anything false."

"I see nothing false in wearing false hair," Jane said, "any more than artificial flowers. It is the fashion, and everybody does it."

"Everybody does it!" Eliza repeated "The worst reason in the world! Don't you think so, Annie?"

Annie had twisted up her hair, and stuck the white camelia behind her ear. "It is not a reason I care about," she answered. "It is nothing to me what people say or do; but I agree so far with Jane that it prevents there being any deceit in the matter. There is the dressing-bell! Are you long getting ready?"

"Oh, dear, no!" both the sisters replied. Is there any one who ever honestly answer "yes" to that question?

"Have you company at dinner to-day?" Jane inquired, with a view to the choice between her blue silk and her white muslin gown.

"Only Mr. Hendon, Mr. Pratt, our clergyman, and my cousin Edgar. Not a very formidable party, you see. What are you counting on your fingers, Jane?"

"That makes seven?"

"Well, and what of that?"

"I never can open my lips at dinner where there are fewer than eight persons."

"You don't say so? Why, at the *cours* you used to be one of the quickest at answering. I remember being quite jealous

at the number of presidencies you got. 'Mademoiselle a la langue très bien pendue,' some of the girls said when they thought you took the shine out of them."

"Oh, Annie, slang!" Eliza exclaimed. "It is not pardonable in you who have no brothers."

Annie laughed, and answered, "Take care, Lizzie. I shall be on the watch, and I venture to say I shall detect you using some slang expression before the day is over."

"We shall have to define what is slang, and what is not," Eliza answered, with a smile. "Rather a difficult thing I fancy."

"But how long have you been afraid of the sound of your own voice, Jane?" Annie asked.

"I do not mind answering a question, but I do not like to converse with my neighbours when everybody can hear what I say."

"But do you think they listen? I find it difficult enough to attend to what is said to myself. I should never think of listening to what was said to other people. Should you, Lizzie?"

"Oh, as to Lizzie," Jane exclaimed, "she knows every word everybody utters all round the table. And that is another thing; I cannot bear her to hear what I say."

"Why?"

"Because I know she thinks it all so stupid."

"Really, Jane, you are too humble," Annie said.

"Or too vain," Eliza added, with a smile.

"It is getting very late," Jane observed. And, as that remark was undoubtedly to the point, they all ran into the house, and up to their rooms.

"Are you ready, dearest love?" Mrs. Gerald asked, as she knocked at her niece's door at a few minutes before seven. Annie appeared dressed for dinner, and looking very handsome. They went downstairs together. The windows of the drawing-room were wide open, and when they came in a young man, who was walking on the terrace, hastened to meet them. This was Edgar Derwent, Mrs. Gerald's nephew and Annie's cousin. They both seemed very glad to see

him; there was, however, something a little reproachful in the tone with which Mrs. Gerald said, "I was almost afraid you would not come. We fully expected you would arrive by the four o'clock train, and I went in the pony-chaise to the station in hopes of finding you there, and having the pleasure of driving you home. But I suppose you did not think we should expect you by that train?"

"To say the truth, I did not know when you would expect me; but I could not leave London by an earlier train."

"It was fortunate Annie did not volunteer to fetch you. She would not at all have liked to be disappointed. I have lived long enough to know that people can never get away from London till the very last possible minute."

Edgar smiled good humouredly, and said, "If I had come when you expected me, I should have had a much pleasanter drive than in that creeping fly, which went at the rate of four miles an hour, I think."

"And you would have had the society of two young ladies," Annie said; "that is, if

you had happened to sit in the same carriage with them."

"Friends of yours coming here?" he asked.

"Yes; the Miss Conways. I have known them a long time. We were always meeting at M. Roche's *cours*."

"Are they daughters of Mr. Conway, a barrister?"

"Yes, their father is a lawyer; they live in Bryanston Square."

"I know him, and I am very glad his daughters are friends of yours."

"Mr. Hendon and Mr. Pratt are also coming to dinner. There is Mr. Pratt in his gig coming up the avenue."

A moment afterwards both those gentlemen, who had driven up to the door at the same time, were announced. Just as dinner was on the table, the Miss Conways came down. It had taken a long time to fasten the camelias in their hair. Jane explained this to Mr. Pratt, who took her in to dinner, and she also defended herself warmly from the charge of unpunctuality, which, in a rather pointed though jesting tone, Mrs.

Gerald had made against her and her sister.

If it had not been for Mrs. Gerald's exertions, there would have been very little conversation during dinner; she had managed to keep it going, and to start subjects generally suitable, rather than particularly interesting. She was a warm-hearted and well-informed person, but her manners were stiff and her language studied. Her voice, too, was always pitched in the same key, and the use of set phrases had become so habitual with her that it had grown into a second nature. It is said that Mrs. Siddons and all the Kembles acquired so strong a habit of using Shaksperian expressions in ordinary conversation, that they did it at last unconsciously. Mrs. Gerald, without any effort, talked like a well-written book. Is it our own fault that we find this tedious—more tedious than many a worse defect? There was, however, much difference of opinion as to her powers of agreeableness; some people thought her very clever. There was no doubt that she acquitted herself extremely well at tenants' dinners or school-examinations,

when she made fluent little speeches in what the schoolmaster called a mellifluous voice, and the housekeeper generally informed the ladies' maids, the first evening they were at Holmwood, that her lady read prayers beautifully. "It was quite a treat to hear her." But if Mrs. Gerald's voice and her way of expressing herself were under strict control, not so her countenance, which, by a singular contrast, manifested with strange clearness the various emotions of a quick temper and keenly susceptible nature. She easily changed colour, her lips sometimes quivered, and her eyes filled with tears on apparently trifling occasions. She had been very pretty, and was still good looking. She had light-blue eyes, a small aquiline nose, and thin lips. There was in her disposition a mixture of impulsiveness and of reserve, of coldness of manner and impetuosity of character. In theory she worshipped common sense, and what the French call *les convenances de la vie.* She was very severe on any follies of conduct or aberrations of mind in others, and was rather prone to read lectures to her friends on the faults she observed in their

characters and proceedings; but under this worldly-wise exterior were hidden many of the weaknesses of a womanly and ardent nature.

Mrs. Gerald had been a widow for more than twenty years. Her husband had died of a fever at Nice a few months after their marriage; and although she had not been supposed to be excessively attached to him, she grieved deeply over his loss, and never thought of marrying again.

The person she had always most loved was her eldest brother, Robert Derwent, Annie's father; and one of her strangest feelings was her passionate fondness for the home of her childhood, and the old family place of the Derwents.

After the death of her idolized brother and his young wife, who had perished by a terrible accident which occurred about a year after she had lost her husband, Mrs. Gerald fixed all her affection on their infant daughter, of whom she was left sole guardian. Holmwood devolved to this child, though a girl, her father having been the last of the entail. His younger brother, Herbert, was Edgar

Derwent's father. Mrs. Gerald devoted herself to her niece with all the energy and exclusiveness belonging to her character. Little Annie's health and education, and the care of her property, were the only objects she lived for.

Annie was four years old when her aunt brought her for the first time to Holmwood. They stayed there almost constantly till she was about fourteen; then they began to spend some time every year in London for the sake of masters, and to attend the *cours*, which were beginning to be in fashion. It was there she had made acquaintance with the Conways. Jane was her own age, Eliza older. As soon as her aunt told her that she was old enough to invite her own friends to Holmwood, which she had done about the time our story begins, Annie had proposed to ask the Conways. Mrs. Gerald had avoided till then giving that invitation. Perhaps she thought Eliza likely to gain influence over Annie, and, without owning it to herself, had a secret jealousy on that point. However, when Annie pressed it, she saw no reason to object, and in that, as

in everything else, Annie had her own way.

Any one who had only judged Mrs. Gerald by hearing her talk, would have fancied her to be the last person in the world likely to spoil any one. She was so sensible in her theories of education, so judicious in her views of moral and intellectual training, so severe on the weakness and folly of the generality of parents, that it would have been natural to suppose that Annie's education would have been systematic and strict, if not severe. But far from it—the lectures freely given to the rest of mankind were scarcely ever bestowed on her own niece. She literally worshipped her, and expected that others should join in that worship. It was easy to perceive that she was always on the watch to see if the idol of her heart was sufficiently admired. There was something touching in this over-weaning affection, because it was not selfish; not in one sense at least. Perhaps it engrossed too much of her heart; perhaps it made her hard, indifferent, and exacting towards others; but as regarded herself it was self-sacrificing and disinterested.

She would have offered up the whole human race as a holocaust, if it could have ensured Annie's happiness; but she would have readily laid herself also at the top of the pile. She had no jealousy of those Annie loved, if only they loved Annie as much as she thought they ought. When this was the case, she gladly admitted them to offer up incense at the shrine of her idol.

The habit Mrs. Gerald had of constantly looking at Annie through her spy-glass, might have been annoying to the young girl had she not been so accustomed to it from childhood, that she hardly noticed it. She did not seem at all aware that her aunt was fonder of her than the generality of parents, aunts, or guardians are wont to be of their children, nieces, or wards. She loved Mrs. Gerald, and knew she had taken great care of her all her life, but looked upon that care and affection rather as a matter of course. At nineteen years of age, she had all the simplicity, straightforwardness, and brusquerie of a girl of twelve. There was a great deal to admire in Annie's looks, and yet it was not everybody that thought her

handsome. She had a well-shaped head and magnificent dark hair, a good figure, a way of walking and holding her head which made her French dancing-master say, "Mademoiselle a le port d'une déesse." But her hands and feet were large—her complexion pale, though healthy—her mouth rather wide. She had large, honest, bright, fearless blue eyes, whose innocently bold expression and confiding gaze, together with the guileless simplicity of her manner, reminded one of Dryden's matchless lines—

> "Without unspotted, innocent within,
> She feared no danger, for she knew no sin."

Annie and her cousin Edgar had been great friends ever since she could remember. She had always cared for him, in fact, more than for anybody else in the world. As long as she had been a child her power over him had been absolute. Afterwards this state of things became reversed; a girl from the age of thirteen to seventeen naturally looks up with some degree of awe to a young man four or five years older than herself. Now again she felt there would be another change in

their relative positions. They had not met for a long time, and in the meanwhile she had come out, an old-fashioned expression still in use, but hardly applicable in the present day, when even little girls are oftener out of the school-room than in it.

In Annie's case it meant dining late with Mrs. Gerald instead of at one o'clock with her governess, and dressing in a manner more accordant with the existing fashion than had been till then considered necessary. But the change had made her, of course, a much more important person, and she flattered herself that Edgar would now talk to her as much as to her aunt. There was a heightened colour in her cheeks, and a bright look in her eyes, when she shook hands with her tall, pale cousin. The last time he had been at Holmwood, she had been somewhat vexed and mortified at the little notice he had taken of her. She was too old at that time to be played with, and he was perhaps not old enough to like the trouble of conversing with a young girl between sixteen and seventeen, who had suddenly become shy and reserved with him. Since then he had travelled

abroad, Mrs. Gerald and Annie had been a great deal away from home, and they had in consequence seldom met, but now for several months he had been studying for the bar in London, and had gladly accepted his aunt's invitation to spend some time with them in the country. He was delighted at the thoughts of seeing the place again, which had been to him in boyhood a sort of earthly Paradise, and at renewing his former intimate intercourse with the only relatives that were dear to him, besides his mother whom he loved, but with whom he had but little sympathy. Annie was very happy to meet again her old playmate and companion, and at the same time felt as if they were for the first time really to make acquaintance with each other, for now they were both grown up, and would be on a different footing together.

When he took her in to dinner, she felt pleased and a little excited. Any kind of feelings with her rose slowly to the surface. It was like one of those great waves which surge up from the depths of the sea, and are slow to break because of their strength.

They did not talk much during dinner,

but as soon as Edgar came into the drawing-room he sat down by her at the table where she was working with her two friends. "How soon you have come," she said, looking up with a bright smile.

"Too soon?" he added, smiling also.

"Oh, no; I did not mean that. On the contrary, I was afraid Mr. Pratt and Mr. Hendon would have kept you ages in the dining-room."

"What are you working?" Edgar asked, taking up a corner of the bit of stuff on her knees.

"A child's pinafore," she answered; "I can do nothing but plain work. But look at that wonderful thing Eliza is making."

Edgar glanced at the piece of silk in Miss Conway's hand. He smiled as his eyes met hers, and looking towards the card table where Mrs. Gerald, Mr. Hendon, and Mr. Pratt were about to sit down to whist, he said, in a low voice, "What would Mr. Pratt say to that piece of work?"

"Would not he approve?" Eliza inquired.

"Approve of a vestment? The very

sight of it, I think, would give him a nervous attack."

"I am so sorry," she answered. "Perhaps I had better put it by."

At that moment Mrs. Gerald asked Miss Conway if she could play at whist; and, when Eliza said "Yes," she exclaimed, "Then do come and save us from dummy; we are so tired of him."

Eliza immediately complied, and in a few minutes Jane inquired if the pianoforte was Erard's or Collard's; upon which hint Annie spoke, and begged her to play "that pretty thing *Le Zéphir*;" and then Edgar and she began to converse comfortably under cover of the rattling execution of Jane's well-practised fingers. Each time a piece came to an end, Annie said, "How pretty that is! Won't you play that other pretty thing, Jane?" and the pleasant noise and the agreeable conversation went on in perfect harmony.

"Annie, how beautiful Holmwood is looking," Edgar said, drawing aside a little the curtain of the window near which they were sitting. The moon was shining on the lawn,

on the grove, and on the river, which was glittering in its rays like a ribbon of liquid silver. It was nearly as bright as day. "It is almost a shame," he added, "to be indoors on such a night as this!"

"I am glad you admire Holmwood as much as ever," Annie said. "I think it is in great beauty just now."

"I much more than admire it; I love it as if it was a person. I am afraid I should dislike any one who did not appreciate Holmwood. To my mind there is no place in the world to be compared to it."

"That is saying too much. There must be some very beautiful places in the world, if we are to believe travellers."

"I am sure everybody would admit it to be one of the loveliest places in England."

"Now you are getting more reasonable. England is a small part of the world."

"Well, England is the world to me. I see the beauties of other countries—I feel those of my own. If ever I write a novel, I shall begin by describing Holmwood."

"What will you say about it?"

"That it is an old house, but not a

gloomy one. That not even the moonlight can make it look sad, which is saying a great deal. Just before dinner, Annie, I walked round the garden, and thought it all so pretty, prettier than ever. I delight in that dear old court, the vine, the fig-trees, the sun-dial, and the sunflowers, the hollyhocks, the pigeon-house, and, more than everything else, the archway and its inscription."

"Oh, so do I. I repeat it very often—'Nisi Dominus edificavit domum in vanum laboraverunt qui edificat eam.'"

"Very well pronounced for a woman, Annie," exclaimed Edgar, laughing. "I am so glad to find that you are worthy to possess this beautiful place of yours. You used not, I think, to be so fond of it."

"I remember your being very angry with me three years ago, because I was glad to go to London. You always used to scold me for not liking it enough."

"Yes, I know I am touchy on that point. Holmwood not only reminds me of the happiest days of my life, but it is to me the type of the most beautiful descriptions of

scenery in the old English poets, and of the good old times in English country life."

"Good old times! Well, I never shall understand . . . ."

"What, I wonder!"

"I say I don't understand, and never shall, why people will always call old times good times. Even the Greeks and Romans did so."

"The Greeks and Romans? why, Annie, I did not know you were a classical scholar!"

"Nonsense. I am not a scholar at all—but one of the good things of these poor new times is that one learns a little of everything."

"I should say that it was one of the bad things of the present day, and the reason why so few people now know anything really well."

"But you will not deny that ever since good books have been written they always speak of the past in that way. I dare say a hundred or two hundred years hence our great grand-children, if such people ever exist, will be sighing over the wickedness of

the twentieth or twenty-first century, and calling *this* time the good old time."

"Well, the world may have really grown so wicked by that time, that the present age may in comparison seem good to them."

"But I do not believe that the world is getting so wicked—worse, I mean, than it used to be."

"Do you know much about the world, Annie?"

"I have read with Miss Rose no end of histories of the world—Greek, Roman, French, English, ancient and modern histories. It is rather hard to be told after that that I know nothing about it."

"I only asked the question. I hope you will never know much more of its wickedness than you learned in the school-room. But we have lost sight of my novel."

"Let us go back to it. You have described the house; you must now say something of the people who live in it."

"Oh, I did not bargain for that. How could I, for instance, describe the mistress of Holmwood to her face?"

"The mistress of Holmwood! How

funny that sounds! I who am not even my own mistress."

"No, really? I thought you had always managed to have your own way ever since you were born."

"Now that is just the sort of thing people choose to suppose. You would not at all fancy giving up your own will as often as I do. But never mind about that, I want you to describe me. It will be like looking into a glass . . . ."

"And then going away, as the Bible says . . . ."

"Forgetting what manner of creature I am? Very likely; but as I am not obliged to believe in you as much as in the Bible, or even the looking-glass, I will take my chance, and hear what you have to say of me. Here is a pencil and a bit of paper. Begin and imagine you are writing a book."

Edgar mused a moment, with a half pensive, half amused expression of countenance, as if collecting his thoughts; and then wrote rapidly, stopping now and then to read *sotto voce* what he had scribbled. "This enchanting abode, the sylvan beauties of which bring

to our recollection some of the prettiest descriptions in Sir Philip Sydney's 'Arcadia,' owns for its mistress a young lady . . . ."

"Do not call me a young *lady*."

"Well, a young woman . . . ."

"That is still worse."

"A young girl."

"That sounds as if I was not more than fifteen."

". . . . the descendant of one of the oldest families in the county of . . . ."

"But I don't know if it is one of the oldest families . . . ."

"Well, let that pass, as we are writing a novel . . . . and one of the handsomest girls . . . ."

"I do not like to be called handsome, it is so much nicer to be pretty."

"Her blue eyes and jet black hair give a somewhat peculiar character to her . . . . *prettiness*. Her smile is charming—her frown awful. If her mouth *is* rather wide . . . ."

"I did not know it was."

". . . . this defect is redeemed by the most brilliant white teeth . . . ."

"Come, I don't want to hear any more

of that nonsense. It is my character I wish described."

"But I have not seen anything of it for two years. It may be quite changed since that time."

"Say what you thought of it then, and I will tell you if it is changed."

"Well, the merits of this young lady are, first, a very honest, truthful nature. She would sooner have her head cut off than tell an untruth. She never beats about the bush to gain her end, but goes straight at it, even through thorns and briers. She has, on the whole, a very good temper, but, like some climates we read of, it is subject to rather violent storms. There is a little stubbornness and not a little pride in her character. She likes better to oblige others than to own herself obliged to any one; and when she is offended at anything . . . ."

"Oh, now I know what you are going to say!"

"No, I am sure you don't."

"Yes; you will say I am then like Helvellyn."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Don't you remember that you used to tease me by repeating when I was angry that line that teaches children to pronounce the letter H—

'How high Helvellyn holds his haughty head!'"

"I assure you that I had quite forgotten that old piece of impertinence of mine, and that now I should not think of saying anything so rude."

"I suppose your description of my character is a true one, and that it will be so to the end of my life. I don't believe in characters changing."

"Surely faults can be cured."

"Have you ever known an ill-tempered person become good-humoured, or a lazy one active?"

"Yes, I have observed great changes of that kind; and, moreover, I believe the best tempers are those which have been made so by effort and self-conquest, and that the most indefatigable activity is that of an indolent person who has become hard-working."

"How do you account for this?"

"By the fact that mere natural good

qualities are not made of such solid stuff as those acquired with labour and difficulty; and then distrust of self is the first condition of perseverance in goodness."

"That may be so. But still I think natural sweetness of temper would always be more attractive than the acquired self-control you speak of."

"Perhaps so; but attractiveness is a poor sort of merit after all. It is a charm, but not a virtue."

"It is like sunshine, I think; whereas the other kind of good temper is like gas-light or candle-light—always the same, but without warmth or brightness."

"I think I could convince you of the contrary. Think the matter over, and watch those two sorts of dispositions."

"I will. Every time I make a new acquaintance, I shall try to discover if they were born good-tempered or made themselves so; and I will tell you which I find the pleasantest."

"By the way, talking of new acquaintances, have you seen yet Mr. Hendon's sister-in-law, Lady Emily?"

"No, she does not arrive till to-morrow. It is a great many years since she has been at Marchbanks."

"I heard in London that she has a young girl with her."

"Yes; Mr. Hendon told us about her. She is the daughter, I believe, of some friends of Lady Emily's who died abroad. Her name is Miss Flower. We shall be obliged to see a great deal of her, I suppose."

"I have heard that your friend Miss Conway is a very delightful person."

"Oh, yes; she is so good and clever, and not tiresome about it."

Edgar laughed.

"Well, but some good and clever people *are* tiresome. I think, if it is not high treason to say so, that Lady Emma Cars is one of them. She is not pleasantly good, like Eliza."

"I dare say not; I am very glad you like Miss Conway."

"Ah! I see they have finished their rubber. I wonder who won. Mr. Pratt, have you won?"

"No, Miss Annie, I have lost eighteen-

pence. But it was not Fortune's fault. I revoked, and my partner bore it like an angel."

"I was only too glad," Eliza said, with a smile, "that that one great crime covered my numerous misdeeds."

The good clergyman smiled too, and soon afterwards took his leave. He was a venerable, gentle-looking old man, with a kind and simple manner which prepossessed every one in his favour. When he had left the room, Mr. Hendon said—

"Dear old Pratt is much aged lately."

"He has had many annoyances this year," Mrs. Gerald answered. "When he went away last spring, the young curate who did duty for him introduced into his church some of the novelties which are now the fashion, and when he came back many of his parishioners were not at all pleased that he suppressed them."

Eliza Conway's face flushed a little, and Edgar bit his lip.

"Was daily service one of those innovations?" he asked.

"Yes," his aunt replied. "And early

communion, too, on Sundays. And then Mr. Rolles put a cross of flowers over the altar, and made a wretched attempt at teaching the school children to chant. This sort of thing should not be attempted unless it can be done properly. Our beautiful Liturgy, when it is well read, is far more impressive than abortive attempts at a choral service."

"But does not that depend on the sort of persons whom we wish should be impressed?" Edgar said. "Paintings and music, which appear to us very imperfect, often may and do excite devotion in uneducated people."

"Of course they do," Mr. Hendon cried. "I have seen peasants abroad praying most fervently before some ugly, tawdrily-dressed image of the Madonna, which would have made educated persons smile."

"But I do not call that ignorant fervour real devotion," Mrs. Gerald exclaimed.

"Well, I remember," Mr. Hendon said, "observing one day a woman kneeling at Lagheto before a statue of the Virgin, praying with outstretched arms and streaming eyes.

She cried over and over again, 'Madre mia, ho quattro fauciulli e sono fuor di testa. Capisce, Madre mia?' ('My mother, I have four children, and I am out of my mind. Do you understand me, my mother?') There was something in that simple statement of a terrible fact, and the urgency with which it was repeated by the poor insane creature, that seemed to me more like real prayer than anything I have ever heard or witnessed in our churches."

"I suppose," Mrs. Gerald rejoined, "that a rational religion would not suit the insane, but you must excuse me if I think that this is no reflection upon it."

"Have we not all a 'petit coin de folie,' which it would be well to take oftener into account?" Mr. Hendon said.

"Surely," Edgar began—he was fond of beginning his sentences in that way—"surely, we may impart beauty to our services, and enlist imagination, which is, after all, one of God's greatest gifts to men, in the cause of religion, and yet avoid the blamable lengths to which Roman Catholics carry outward practices of devotion."

"I do not myself object to anything in good taste," Mrs. Gerald said.

"I did not like what Mr. Rolles did," Annie observed, "because it vexed dear Mr. Pratt, and he said things about him I cannot forgive. He called him a heretic. I am sure he is much more of a heretic himself."

"Are you certain, Annie," Edgar whispered, "that you know what it means to be a heretic?"

"It is something bad," she quickly answered, "and I know no one so good as Mr. Pratt."

Edgar was preparing to answer that argument, but Mrs. Gerald changed the subject by asking Mr. Hendon how long it was since Lady Emily had been at Marchbanks.

"More than twenty-two years," he replied.

"This is the first time since my brother's death that I have been able to prevail upon her to pay me a visit. I hope she will spend all the autumn with me, and that it will be a fine one. She has lived so entirely abroad, and is so delicate, that I am rather anxious about her. You remember Lady Emily, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. We used to meet very often in former days."

"I hope Miss Derwent will be pleased with my sister-in-law's adopted daughter, Miss Flower. If she is as attractive now as she was when I last saw her, four or five years ago, she must be a very engaging little person."

Mrs. Gerald said she was sure Annie would be delighted to make acquaintance with Miss Flower.

Annie made no remark.

As Mr. Hendon was going away, he said, "I hear the Carsdales are going to give a ball for Lord Carsdown's coming of age."

"So I have been told," Mrs. Gerald said. "If we are asked, I think we must go. It will be, strange to say, Annie's first ball."

"I may tell Lady Emily you will soon come to see her?"

"Certainly, I will," Mrs. Gerald answered, and then Mr. Hendon departed.

The ladies lighted their candles, and went to bed. Edgar walked on the terrace, and smoked a cigar. The night was beautiful—the sky perfectly cloudless and starry. Not

a breath of air stirred the leaves—no sound reached the ear except the murmur of the little river.

"Dear, dear old place, I love you better than ever!" he thought, or perhaps exclaimed, for the window of Annie's room was open, and she heard, or fancied she heard, him say those words; and she smiled as she looked at the view, which she had never before admired half as much.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Gerald went into Annie's room, as she often did the last thing at night. She found her, having just closed the window, and sitting before her dressing-table in a pensive attitude. She kissed her, and said—"I hope you have been amused and happy to-night, my darling?"

"Yes, very happy indeed. I am so glad Edgar likes Eliza. I thought he would. We are such a snug, comfortable party just as we are, I hope nobody else will come. Oh, Aunt Gerald! that Miss Flower! Shall we be obliged to see much of her?"

"It will be difficult to help it. But let us hope for the best; from what Mr. Hendon said she is likely to be pleasing. Perhaps she will prove a pleasant addition to our society."

"I do not want any additions to it."

"You did not take too long a walk to-day? I hope you did not overtire yourself?"

It was one of Mrs. Gerald's peculiarities to be in constant fear of fatigue for Annie, who was really as strong as a little horse.

"Tired," she exclaimed, bursting out laughing; "what, with walking once round the Park! You know I am never tired when I am amused."

"You seemed to get on very well this evening with Edgar. I never saw you talk so much to any one before, I think, except the Conways."

"It is very easy to talk to him. It seemed so natural. Don't you think he is grown very handsome?"

"Yes, and he looks so refined—so distinguished."

"And you can't think how enthusiastic he is about Holmwood. He does not think I am half as fond of it as I ought to be."

"I hope he is mistaken there, dearest Annie; I flatter myself you are getting every day more alive to its beauties, more grateful for the possession of such a place, and more anxious to fulfil your duties towards

those whom Providence has, in a certain sense, placed under your care."

"Oh yes. Did you remember to speak to Davis about the croquet ground? Jane would like to play, I know."

"He will come to-morrow morning to receive your directions about it."

"I must go after breakfast to-morrow to the East Lodge to see Nancy Drake; Mr. Pratt says she wants some broth. Edgar will walk there with Eliza and me."

"You must not go there if she has a fever, my love."

"She has broken her leg. That is not catching," Annie replied, looking at her aunt in a triumphant manner.

Mrs. Gerald kissed her over and over again, and then wished her good-night. Before going to bed she wrote the following letter to Miss Rose, who had been Annie's governess. She was now settled in London as a music-mistress.

"My dear Miss Rose,—I must write a few lines to tell you that Edgar arrived to-day. As far as I can judge, he is as much as

ever all I could wish. Amiable and pleasing in manner, and, moreover, much handsomer than I used to think he would be. There is great beauty in the expression of his brow and eyes, and something refined and intellectual in his countenance, which recalled to my recollection Mrs. Norton's lines—

'Pale to transparency the pensive face,
Pale not with sickness but with studious thought,
The body tasked—the fine mind overwrought.
With something faint and fragile in the whole,
As though 'twere but a lamp to hold a soul.'

"Annie seems delighted with her cousin, and shows it in her own charming, unaffected manner. It would be a great happiness to me if the affection which always existed between her and Edgar as children should now assume a different character, and they were to marry. It has always been my wish, and I am giving him now, as it were, the first chance of winning this great prize, which so many would try for if I allowed them the opportunity. I know so well the strength of Edgar's principles and the goodness of his heart, that I should not hesitate to confide Annie's happiness to his keeping. Of course, few girls would have so

many opportunities of marrying in what is called a brilliant manner as this dear child. But that is the very reason why I dread taking her into society, where she would become an object of interest and pursuit to persons bent on making or mending their fortunes, and run the risk of attaching herself to a man not sincerely devoted to her.

"There is another reason, perhaps a foolish one, which makes me, I own, very much wish her to marry Edgar. If it had not been for her narrow escape from death when a baby, he would have inherited this large property and this place, which you know he is so passionately fond of. Twice she was nearly dying: on that fatal day when both her parents perished; and again, a year or two afterwards, by a long lingering illness. When she was slowly recovering at Nice, where she spent the early years of her life, Edgar came there with his mother, the present Mrs. Langdon. His father (my brother Herbert) had not long survived poor Robert and his wife. He was then a little fellow, about six or seven years of age, and proved at that time the greatest of com-

forts to his tiny cousin. She was so delicate that I could not venture to let her play with other children, but he was so gentle and sensible that he could be trusted with her, and the society of her young companion did her more good than any medicine. I dated her recovery from the time when she began to play with him in the garden of the Villa Bianca. They used to stay out for hours together, creeping under the orange-trees, building houses with cones, or digging trenches in the sand. I can see them now; the strong rosy boy full of health and vigour, and the pale wee toddling creature trotting after him, or sitting on his knees, looking like a wax doll. He seeming almost afraid of hurting the fragile little thing, by touching her, while she cuffed him and tyrannized over him with all the pretty despotism of indulged infancy. Even then I remember thinking that they might perhaps one day marry, and possess together this place which neither of my brothers lived to enjoy. This evening, seventeen years afterwards, here at Holmwood, as I saw them sitting together on the sofa near the window, I was musing on the change

which time had wrought. The pale, delicate infant grown into our healthy blooming Annie, and the robust, rosy boy of former days turned into a grave, thoughtful-looking man. Both still handsome, each in their way, but so different from what they were as children. And now you may imagine, dear Miss Rose, how anxiously I wait to see what course things will take.

"You sometimes see Edgar's mother. I should have no objection to your giving her a hint of my feelings on the subject. Under the circumstances it is clear that he could hardly think of such a thing himself without some very decided encouragement from Annie herself and from me. What amount of encouragement she may give him remains to be seen, but there would be no harm in his knowing that if she wished to marry him I should offer no opposition to that wish.

"I have never been on terms of intimacy with my sister-in-law. I could not speak, and still less write, to her on the subject; but a remark which would seem to come from yourself might be a sufficient hint, and yet not commit us in any way.

"I will soon write again, for I know how anxious you are to hear everything about Annie. I wish you were here; I miss our conversations in the school-room; you are the only person to whom I can speak of her without reserve.

"Yours affectionately,

"M. GERALD."

When Mrs. Gerald had written, sealed, and directed this letter, she went to one side of her bed-room and drew aside a silk curtain which covered the pictures of several members of her family who were dead. She kept their portraits in a sort of sacred seclusion. What to many persons is a consolation—the hourly sight, amidst the occupations and business, the joys and trials of life, of loved faces which were once the objects of hopes or of cares which made life happy or anxious, of faces never again to be seen in this world—was to Mrs. Gerald a pain too acute to endure. She never would look at them except when alone. Amongst these pictures there was one of Annie's mother, with Annie herself in her arms when a baby of a few

months old. It had been painted in Florence a short time before Mrs. Derwent's death. Annie used sometime to go into her aunt's room, when she knew she was out, to have a good look at these family portraits. There was a half-length picture of her father, and some small sketches of him as a boy. One also of Edgar's father, of Mrs. Gerald's parents, and her husband. That evening the curtain was lifted up, and Mrs. Gerald stood for a few minutes gazing first on one and then on the other of those pictures, with a thoughtful, scrutinizing look. Especially she fixed her eyes long and wistfully on the portrait of Annie's mother, and sighed deeply as she turned away.

On the following morning, Jane and Annie played duets together, Eliza wrote letters in her room, and Edgar read in the library. When at about one o'clock Annie came in to fetch a book for her aunt, he looked up and said, "Are you a worthy possessor of this delightful library, Annie? Do you make much use of these charming books?"

She shook her head, and answered with a smile, "'Vous vous moquez de moi,' as

M. Legrand said when I asked him if he could teach me the figure of an English country dance. No, I have not, unfortunately, any taste for reading."

"You don't say so? I could hardly have believed this possible for any one brought up by Aunt Gerald."

"She cannot believe it herself. I assure you that she labours under the illusion that I read a great deal—at odd times, she says. I have heard her tell people so. Have you not observed that she has a wonderful talent for believing whatever she wishes? It provokes me very much sometimes. I don't know if it is right or not to let people go on thinking things are true when they are not so, if it gives them pleasure."

"If the illusion does not do them nor any one else harm, I suppose you are not bound to dispel it."

"Oh, as to dispelling Aunt Gerald's notions, it would be quite labour thrown away to attempt it. All I can do is to protest against them."

"Suppose you were, in this one instance, to turn her illusion into a reality."

"By reading more, you mean? Well, perhaps I may try that some day. I suppose a library is quite a paradise to you?"

"It is a great enjoyment, and this particular library is such an available one. The books are so close at hand, so easily reached, and so well arranged. There is a combined smell of flowers and of books here which is very delightful, and I have been reading since breakfast without a single interruption."

"Did not the playing in the next room disturb you?"

"Not at all. The quadrilles did not interfere in the least with my enjoyment of the 'Idylls.'"

"What! were you reading doleful poems? I wonder, then, that our merry tunes did not bother you."

"No, gay music always gives me a feeling of pleasant sadness—if those two words can go together—so there was no discordancy between the impressions produced by Tennyson's poetry. . . . ."

"And our strumming! Well, I'm glad of it."

"Is music your favourite occupation?"

"No, what I like best is work—plain work, at least. Gardening also amuses me, but there is such a fuss made about my not standing in the sun, or in the wet, that it ends by being tiresome. I believe I like nothing so much as riding. Will you ride with me this afternoon? I want to take you to see the new road across the Park, and the summer-house we have built at the top of Lonehill."

"I shall like it very much. Do your friends ride too?"

"Jane does, and Eliza will drive in the pony chaise with Aunt Gerald."

So Annie had planned, and so it happened, except that Jane had a headache, and would not go out; so she and her cousin had, in consequence, another long conversation, in the course of which she found out that he was very High Church, which vexed her a little. Not that she had any clear ideas herself on the subject of churches, high or low, or broad, but because he would not now, she was afraid, like Mr. Pratt, or Mr. Pratt's sermons, as much as she wished him to do. They stopped at the parsonage on their way

home, and paid the clergyman a visit. They found him, having just finished his five o'clock dinner, and sitting by the window which overlooked his garden watching his bee-hives, a favourite amusement of his, and one which Annie had often shared. "To go and see Mr. Pratt's bees," had been held out to her, and indeed always proved through her childhood an extraordinary treat. A pleased smile beamed on the old man's face as he saw the cousins dismount and walk up the narrow approach to his house.

"Welcome, Miss Annie," he said. "How do you do, Mr. Edgar? It is some time, Miss Annie, since you have paid my bees and me a visit. 'How doth the little busy bee improve each shining hour.' Eh? Do you remember my teaching you that hymn the first time you ever came to see me after you arrived from abroad?"

"Yes, of course I do; and have not I been ever since 'gathering honey from every opening flower'?"

"Well, my dear, I hope you have. There is a pretty lesson in that line. The world is divided between those who go about gather-

ing honey, like my good bees, and those that sting and leave poison behind them, like idle, mischievous wasps. Have you been showing Mr. Derwent all the new improvements, as you call them? I do not know that I think them all improvements, but then I am an old man, and I dislike changes and novelties of every kind."

This, he said, kindly but pointedly, as he looked at Edgar, who coloured a little, and replied, "But do you not think it desirable to build up again the ruins of the past?"

"To build up ruins, my dear sir, is a hazardous undertaking, and an imprudent one I think, if, in order to accomplish it, you pull down a good serviceable house, as my friend Mr. Bayley did at Rangeside. In trying to restore part of his mansion, which was old, he pulled to pieces the remainder, which had been inhabited by his father and his ancestors for many generations."

Edgar smiled and said, "You are speaking allegorically I suppose, Mr. Pratt?"

"Well, I confess, my dear sir, I am

afraid that with those new ideas of reviving old practices, the good people of this day will pull down our Protestant Church of England and deal a fatal blow to the reformed religion."

Edgar winced at the word Protestant. He had been associating with members of the Church of England who repudiated the name of Protestant, and called Protestantism a heresy. It was very painful to him to hear an Anglican clergyman use that obnoxious word. It vexed, it shocked him very much, and yet what could he say? It was difficult, indeed almost impossible, to give expression to this feeling. To persons of advanced age in England, there is something so preposterous in the idea that the church which they have always considered to be Protestant, and which was universally accepted as such till within the last few years, is not so, that it would really require some degree of moral courage to make the assertion in their presence. An old-fashioned clergyman of the Church of England, surrounded by Ritualists, must feel somewhat as a sane man would do if accidentally shut up in a lunatic asylum.

Such a one might hear those about him declare so confidently that they were emperors or kings, that he might, after a while, almost question his own sanity in disbelieving their assertions. Perhaps, after all, they might be in their right mind, and he himself insane. Certainly, if anybody had attempted to prove to Mr. Pratt that England was not an island, he would not have been more taken by surprise than by being told that its church was not Protestant.

Edgar felt a consciousness of this, and said nothing in reply to his last remark; and Annie, in order to change the subject, began to speak of the approaching school feast, and of the number of buns and pounds of tea which would be required. She saw her cousin in the meantime taking up one after another the books on the table, and putting them down again with a look of annoyance. This disturbed her calculations, and she had to go over them a second time.

When that part of the business was accomplished, Mr. Pratt said, "I have just seen Mr. Hendon's carriage drive by with Lady Emily in it. She is not as much

altered as I should have expected. I should have known her again, though it is now twenty-three years since she went away."

"Did you see if her ward, Miss Flower, was with them?"

"There was a young lady by her side. I did not know who it was."

Edgar made an effort to join in the conversation. "I wonder if there is more of pain or of pleasure in this return after so long an absence."

"I should think there must be a great deal of heartache in it. Mr. Charles Hendon died here quite suddenly, and he was not the sort of man one would have wished to see die in that way."

"I am curious to know," Annie said, "if I shall like Miss Flower. What did you think of her looks?"

"I scarcely saw her. They passed very quickly, and I was thinking only of Lady Emily."

After a little more talk on various subjects, the young people took leave of Mr. Pratt. He wished them a pleasant ride home. The parsonage was at one end of

Holmwood Park, about half a mile from the house.

"By the way," Annie said, turning back, "may I have the key of the church? Edgar wants to go into it, and it is always locked."

"The sexton has got the key, my dear; but there is nothing new to be seen there since your cousin was here before."

"But he says that when he was abroad he often went into the churches, which were always open. I think," she added, lowering her voice, "that he likes saying his prayers there."

"Well, my dear, it is always a good thing to pray; but I read in the Bible that we are to go into our closets, and shut the door, that men may not see us praying; and except at the time of public worship, I own I think we may as well keep to that precept. I do not see myself what there is in an empty church to help us in our prayers."

"Nothing certainly," Edgar answered, "unless there are in it objects which excite holy thoughts, and aid us to lift up our souls

to God. In many of our churches now we do find such objects."

"You will not find anything Popish in mine, dear Mr. Derwent. God forbid I should speak harshly of any class of Christians, but as long as I live I will resist the introduction amongst us of practices which lead to errors of doctrine, and to a mode of worship quite inconsistent with the spirit of our reformed church."

Edgar did not make any reply, but looked pained. Annie got upon her horse. Her old friend gathered a bunch of Banksia roses, and as he gave them to her whispered—

"You can have the key of the church, my dear, as often as you want it. I am always glad to find a young man caring about saying his prayers, wherever it may be; and your cousin seems a thoughtful kind of person, not giddy—'fast,' I think, they call it now-a-days —as so many young people are. Only I hope he will not make you a Puseyite. I should be sorry, my dear, very sorry, if you were ever to be ashamed of calling yourself a Protestant."

"How could I ever be ashamed of being

what *you* are!" exclaimed Annie, smiling affectionately on the old man. "But I am glad you are not displeased with Edgar. I want you to like him, because," she lowered her voice a little, and added, "because I like him very much—more than ever."

Mr. Pratt smiled too, and said, as they rode off, "God bless you both."

He stood a moment shading his eyes with his hand from the slanting rays of the afternoon sun; and when they were out of sight he returned to his bee-hives, and sat thoughtfully musing on the visit he had received.

"Dear me!" he murmured to himself, "what a pity it is that young men in our days cannot be contented with reading their Bibles, and being quiet, practical Christians. If they think of their souls at all, they must be taking up all sorts of strange crotchets, and unsettling people's minds. This cousin of my little Annie's seems a good sort of youth, I saw he was vexed at what I said about the Puseyites; but he did not tell me to my face, as Mr. Rolles did, that I had been teaching heresy all my life, and did not understand

the Prayer-book, which I used and loved long before he was born."

Everything seemed to promise well for the fulfilment of Mrs. Gerald's wishes. Edgar had been more than a fortnight at Holmwood. Annie was apparently delighted with his society, and he showed no disinclination to prolong his visit. Miss Rose had written that she had not seen Mrs. Langdon since she had received Mrs. Gerald's letter, but that when she had an opportunity of doing so she should not fail to convey the important intimation. Mrs. Gerald did not regret the delay; on the contrary. It would be all the better that a little more time should elapse before the hint was conveyed to Edgar, and there could be no doubt his mother would lose no time in doing so, when once in possession of the fact.

Towards the end of July, several days of almost ceaseless rain confined to the house Annie Derwent and her friends. Time, however, did not hang heavy on their hands. Eliza Conway had plenty to occupy her mind, and Jane had no mind to occupy, or at any rate so small a one that a little stitching, a

little music, and a very little thinking were enough to fill it. Mrs. Gerald and Eliza Conway conversed a great deal with Edgar, and Annie listened attentively; less, perhaps, that she cared much for the subject of these conversations, than because she liked to hear her cousin talk. Mrs. Gerald often introduced topics of discourse that related to politics and literature. Edgar and Eliza eagerly entered on these discussions, but did not confine themselves to the limits she would, have been inclined to assign to them, such as the state of political parties and the comparative merits of different books and authors. With the spirit of the present generation strong within them, they plunged into the social and religious questions of the day, and descanted upon them with all the fervour of youth and inexperience, and the ardent interest which the actual state of the world, and our own country in particular, excites in earnest natures. For everything now in politics and literature, whatever relates to the fate of nations or affects the course of legislature, is connected with the creeds of men, and bears directly or indi-

rectly on those all important questions, "Church or no Church," "Faith or no faith," and, as far as the world's verdict goes, "God or no God."

Christianity has never been, perhaps, so openly blasphemed, in the ears of the multitude at least, so intensely hated, so violently attacked, as at the present day; but never, also, has it been less despised and less ignored. Whereas, some of the most popular authors of the beginning of this century could write volume upon volume of fiction with hardly a word in them indicating that the thought of it ever crossed their minds; now scarcely a book of any sort is published which does not take sides for or against religion, or attempt to reconcile the denial of revealed truth with a vague adherence to some nameless faith. Atheism itself has become a sect, and despair a creed. Religious forms of speech are borrowed by the sceptic, and sentimental allusions to an unknown God, wind up with open attacks and covert sneers. On the other hand, no real Christian, of any denomination, can treat of the realities of life, or picture in fiction its mysteries of

sorrow and joy, without reference to the supernatural truths which influence the souls of men. While democracy rises like a surging sea, and men feel that, whether for good or for evil, the masses of their fellow-creatures must gain more and more power, the more eager, strong, intense, becomes the desire of the Christian and the Atheist, of the Catholic and the Infidel, to win them to hold or to deny, to retain or to abjure the faith which stands like a battered fortress, incessantly assailed by fresh enemies, but eternally defended by new combatants. The immense change in England with regard to the books which take the greatest hold on the mind of youthful readers of the better sort, of those that shun in fiction unwholesome excitement, is strikingly exemplified when we contrast the works of Miss Edgeworth with those of Miss Sewell, those of Miss Austin with Miss Yonge's. Even Sir Walter Scott's novels have almost ceased to charm the present generation. Stirring descriptions of historical events, glowing pictures of the pageantries of past ages, have far less interest, even for the young, than the analysis of

character and revelations of a hidden life, which are often contained in the writings of the present day. Whatever treats of inward conflicts, secret perplexities, and the various trials of individual minds and hearts, necessarily commands attention at a moment when anything that can throw light on the difficulties which so many are experiencing may tend, even remotely, to their solution.

Edgar and Miss Conway shared the tendency of their generation in this respect. They had already taken their side in the most important point at issue in the religious community to which they belonged. The revival of Catholic doctrine and practice in the Anglican Church excited to the uttermost their sympathy and enthusiasm. Both of them had been lately living in London, and had been actively engaged in works of charity in connection with the Established Church. Miss Conway was intelligent, well-informed, conscientious—capable of laying down her life had it been necessary for a principle, a friend, or a fallacy. Although naturally most honest and truthful, she had an extraordinary power of shutting her eyes

to the clearest amount of evidence if it told against her own views, and disliked the society of those who differed from her; not from any unamiable feeling towards them, but simply because it gave her absolute pain to hear a doubt expressed or implied with regard to the theory on which she rested her faith.

Mrs. Gerald, on the contrary, delighted in discussion; she was an extremely candid and liberal person, and objected to no opinions which did not involve disagreeable practical conclusions. She had very great skill in drawing out people in conversation, and leading them to express their ideas, and a way of listening, which conveyed the impression that though she did not altogether agree with them, there was, nevertheless, a great deal in what they said which struck her very much. She always seemed ready to give a favourable construction to the opinions of others, and to allow the most she could for their side of the question. It was in this manner that she lent a willing ear to Edgar's Anglo-Catholic views. At first she had felt uneasy from the fear that some Romish ten-

dencies might exist in his mind. But when she found that he was decidedly averse to Romanism, and that in answer to some remark she made on recent secessions, he made a most energetic protest against what he called the sin of abandoning "the Church of our baptism," she was quite reassured, and, without adopting his opinions, was willing to extend to them the utmost indulgence.

As to Annie, she neither understood, nor approved, nor sympathized with her cousin's opinions; but she admired him. It was quite new to her to hear any one, and especially a young man, speak of religion in the earnest way he did. She had been used to think it rather a dull subject than otherwise. It had not much occupied her thoughts. She had followed the daily routine to which she had been accustomed from childhood. Whatever Miss Rose had told her was right to do she did, and what Mr. Pratt had taught her she believed. The books through which she had learnt history and ethics, were, on the whole, guiltless of having imparted to her mind any particular shades of opinion, beyond a general idea that Catholicism was wrong,

and Protestantism right; but no reflections on the subject, or comparison in her own thoughts between different creeds, had ever disturbed or even occupied her mind. Since she had known Eliza Conway, indeed, she had sometimes felt surprised at her saying things that seemed to her very different from what she had ever learnt in the school-room, or heard from the pulpit; but her attention had not been roused, and she had taken little heed of them. But it was very different now that she listened to Edgar talking "on serious subjects," as Miss Rose used to call them. It was with awe and pleasure, though sometimes with a little uneasiness also, that she watched his eager countenance, when he was broaching what seemed to her new and startling doctrines. Perhaps the very novelty of his opinions interested her in his favour; they implied belief in what was more supernatural than anything she had ever been taught about religion. She did not feel the least inclined to adopt those views; but by a strange, yet not uncommon inconsistency, she liked him the better for holding them.

He was pleased at the attentive way in

which she listened to him; for he had been afraid, from what he had heard, that she would take very little interest in the questions he had most at heart. At first he hoped Annie might be easily made into a good churchwoman; but though she did not oppose anything he said, he soon perceived that he was not making any impression upon her. She did not show any disposition to adopt the opinions of the school to which he belonged. The fact was that her plain, straightforward, unimaginative mind was incapable of admitting the idea that the Protestant Church, in which she had been educated, was, after all, not a Protestant Church. Everything she had ever been taught or read now came back to her mind, and in the midst of Edgar's learned explanations and appeals to antiquity she kept saying sometimes to herself, and sometimes aloud, "But for all that, I *am* a Protestant." He was vexed at this one day, and answered, "I am afraid so, Annie." This made her a little angry. Hers was not one of those womanly natures which are always ready to follow in the wake of those

they love. If she had been ever so much attached to any one, it would not have influenced her on such points. It might even have induced her to remain more immovably attached to the ideas instilled into her in childhood. Nevertheless, she would have been perhaps less attracted by her cousin, less occupied about him, less inclined to muse over what he said and thought, if he had not held this new faith, or led in many respects a different life from other people; if he had been, like herself, a Christian and a churchman after Mr. Pratt's fashion.

One chilly afternoon, towards the end of the third week in July, Mrs. Gerald was sitting with Annie, over a wood fire in her own room. The conversation turned, not an unusual occurrence, on Edgar's merits.

"There is something so noble, so generous about him," Mrs. Gerald said. "Some of his ideas are a little enthusiastic and eccentric; but this is so often the case with clever people that it does not surprise or alarm me."

"I suppose it is because he is so clever that I sometimes feel frightened when I talk to him."

"Do you feel afraid of him, my love? I thought you seemed quite at your ease with Edgar."

"I am never shy with anybody. It is not that sort of feeling I mean, but I am puzzled by the things he says—about religion, for instance. I cannot argue with him. I am not clever enough. But it is all quite different from what Mr. Pratt thinks, and a clergyman, after all, ought to know best."

"I do not think, my love, that you ought to trouble your mind on that subject. There is such a variety in men's minds that you will hardly find two persons thinking alike on every point, and there are many things about which it is not at all necessary that people should agree."

"Well, perhaps not; but I like things to be settled. I was always sorry there were so many different religions in the world, but it is still worse if in the same church people think so differently."

"They agree in essential points."

"Do you think so? Edgar and Mr. Pratt?"

"They have both signed the Thirty-Nine Articles."

"Oh! the Thirty-Nine Articles! But Edgar wants to do away with them."

"At any rate, they use the same prayers."

"Yes, on Sundays, I suppose they do. But Edgar says prayers that Mr. Pratt would not use on any account. He told me so."

"But those are minor points. There is surely enough to establish sympathy between members of the same church if they believe in the great truths of Christianity and go to the same church."

"Ah, but Edgar says Mr. Pratt does not believe in some great truths of Christianity, and Mr. Hendon believes only in the existence of God and a future state, and not that the whole Bible is inspired, and he thinks it shocking if people call our Lord Jesus Christ God; and yet he says he is a member of the Church of England. Then Mr. Pratt is a Protestant, and so are we, if I am to believe what I have always been taught; and yet Edgar and Eliza do nothing but abuse Protestantism, and won't be called any-

thing but Catholics. It is dreadfully puzzling."

"But, at any rate, we all go to church together, and use the same beautiful Liturgy."

"Oh, yes. Going together to church is a great thing. I was thinking yesterday how nice it was to have Edgar with us again in the dear old pew, where he used to find for me the lessons when I was little. Don't you remember? Those first Christmas holidays he spent here? But I was sorry that he said as we came out that he hated those old pews."

"He has such good taste that anything ugly shocks his eyes; and you must own, dearest Annie, that those dear old pews, as you call them, disfigure a church."

"I don't care; I like the old green baize thing, and nobody shall talk me out of that liking."

"Not *even* Edgar?"

"No; not *even* Edgar," Annie answered, with a rather conscious smile. There was something in her countenance at that moment that made Mrs. Gerald think that the moment was perhaps come to give her niece a hint as to

her own long-cherished desire. Since Edgar had been at Holmwood this time she had rejoiced to see how well the cousins were getting on together, and seemed to enjoy each other's society. Her disposition to believe whatever she wished led her to conclude that everything was progressing favourably towards the accomplishment of her hopes. She longed to speak to Annie on the subject. It was a dangerous experiment, but she could not resist the impulse. If any one had seen her face and Annie's during the conversation that ensued, it would have been supposed that the aunt was more deeply interested in the matter than the niece. "Dearest love," she began, "you know I cannot help thinking a great deal about the future, and often wondering what your fate will be. There is nothing I care about as much as your happiness, and lately my thoughts have been running . . . ."

"On what, Aunt Gerald?" Annie quickly asked.

"Well, I have been wondering whether if Edgar was to fall in love with you . . . . there are more improbable things than that

. . . . whether you would be inclined to like him . . . ."

"Like him!" Annie exclaimed. "Why, Aunt Gerald, don't you know that I have loved Edgar with all my heart since I was quite a baby? . . . ."

"Oh yes, my love; but what I mean is, whether you would like him in a different kind of manner. . . . . Whether he is the sort of person you—would wish to marry?"

Annie blushed, but answered bluntly, "That is just what I have been thinking of myself."

"Have you indeed?" Mrs. Gerald exclaimed; "and what *do* you think?"

"When he was speaking yesterday after church of this place, and giving me advice about building cottages and making all sorts of improvements here, it occurred to me how very nice it would be for both of us if he should like to marry me. He said, with that eager look in his eyes which they have when anything interests him, 'Oh, Annie, what a position yours will be! What a field to work in: what talents God has placed in your hands! You will have a strict account to give of

them; but I am sure you will do all you ought.' Now you know, Aunt Gerald, if he was my husband he would help me to do everything that is right, and it would be easy to be good with one like him to teach me what to do."

"These are the very thoughts I have had, Annie darling, not for some hours or some days, but for a long time past. It would make me so happy."

"Well, and so it would me; but I do not expect it will happen. He is very fond of me and very kind to me; but I do not think I am the sort of girl he would like to marry. I am too stupid for him."

"My love, that is a great mistake. You are not at all stupid; on the contrary, you have a great deal of good sense and intelligence, but the merits of your understanding are of a different sort from his, and that is what gives you a sense of inferiority. This does not at all make it unlikely that he should admire and appreciate you; on the contrary, it is often the persons least similar in mind and character who get on best together. I have seen him look sometimes

when he is talking to you as if he might be in danger of admiring you too much for his peace."

"I am sure he does not think of anything of the sort. He sometimes speaks of the time when I shall be married, and not at all in the way he would if he was thinking of himself."

"Well, you know he would not easily imagine that such a possibility existed."

"Why not?"

"Because, as the opinion of the world goes, it would be such a bad marriage for you. He has no fortune at all, and you are a rich heiress. This would make him, of course, very diffident. He would feel afraid that the attentions he might pay, and the attachment he might show to one whom it would be so very much his interest to marry, might be ascribed to worldly and selfish motives. Edgar is so generous and high-minded that I am sure he would feel this very strongly."

"Would it be then like with the Queen and Prince Albert? Should I be obliged to say to him, 'My cousin, would you like to live always at Holmwood?'"

"No," Mrs. Gerald answered, laughing.

"You would not be obliged actually to propose to him. All I meant was, that in your relative positions a little more encouragement on your side would be needed than is generally the case. But mind, Annie darling, you must take time to consider whether he is really the person most likely to make you happy. It is fair to tell you that if I was to take you to London, and you went much into society, you would soon have ten offers of marriage rather than one."

"Because I am so rich, you mean. But I should not like any of those people; I should never care about any of them as I do for Edgar."

"You have not had opportunities of comparing him with other young men."

"I am sure I should not think anybody to be compared to him, and there is no one who would be so fond of Holmwood, or who would like so much to have it for his own, as he would."

Mrs. Gerald could not help smiling.

"As to liking to have Holmwood, I am not so sure. But I am quite ready to agree

with you that no one would be worthier of possessing it and of marrying my Annie. And so you feel about your cousin as Miranda did about Prince Ferdinand! She had no ambition to see a goodlier man, and wished for no other companion, nor could she form in her imagination a shape to like of besides him. Is it even so, Annie?"

Annie laughed. "But for all that, Aunt Gerald, I do not think Edgar will ever be . . . ."

"At your feet, my Miranda. Well, we shall see."

There the conversation ended, and the rain that had kept for so many days the inhabitants of Holmwood imprisoned within doors, came also to an end. There was a bright red sunset that evening, and the next morning the sun was shining brightly.

CHAPTER III.

On the following morning, Annie rose in high good humour. Her conversation with her aunt had left an agreeable impression on her mind; and when she came downstairs, and went out from the breakfast-room on to the terrace where everything was fresh and lovely, the flowers smelling deliciously, and the distant views veiled by a transparent and most becoming haze, promising a fine day, she felt a pleasurable emotion in the thought that this home, this ancestral home of hers, as Mrs. Gerald liked to call it, was a gift in her possession, a gift she could bestow on any one she loved. Her heart swelled with some little self-complacency, and a shade of that feeling might have been detected in her manner as she walked into the house and took her place at the breakfast table.

The post arrived at Holmwood early in the morning, so that Edgar had read his letters before leaving his room. When he came down, Annie said to him, "The sun, you see, has come out as I predicted last night; but the worst of it is that I am sure Aunt Gerald will insist on our going to Marchbanks to-day."

"I do not see, Annie, how we can put it off any longer," Mrs. Gerald observed; "and you must come with us, Edgar, you have not called yet on Mr. Hendon."

"I am so sorry," Edgar answered, "but I am obliged to go away to-day."

"To-day!"

"Yes; I have received letters which oblige me to go to London."

"On business?" Mrs. Gerald asked with a heightened colour. "Will it detain you long?"

"I cannot tell. It is quite uncertain."

"Nothing unpleasant has happened, I hope?"

"Nothing that concerns me personally, or any of our friends," he replied.

Annie was looking grave. She was very much disappointed, and not at all used to

disappointment. She had been gradually discovering that she not only loved Edgar very much as she had always done, but that since he had been this time at Holmwood a new feeling towards him had been springing up in her heart, like what she had often read of, not exactly in novels, for few of them had been put in her hands (and indeed of her own accord and for her own pleasure she seldom opened a book), but in tales and poems she had read with Miss Rose. It was, she thought, or would be some day like what Amy in the "Heir of Redclyffe" felt for Guy, or Evangeline for Gabriel the son of the blacksmith. These descriptions had made little impression upon her at the time, but now they helped her to see that she was really likely to love Edgar, provided he also loved her in the way Mrs. Gerald meant. Almost all night she had been awake thinking over the new ideas suggested by what her aunt had said, and considering what was the sort of encouragement she ought to give to a cousin who was not rich, but whom she should like very much to marry if he should wish it himself.

Annie had never thought much for a girl of her age, and this had been almost the first occasion on which she had exercised her reflective powers on a subject of importance. On the whole those sleepless hours had been happy ones, and the conclusion she had come to satisfactory. It was, therefore, with difficulty that she restrained tears of vexation, not only at Edgar's going away so suddenly, but at the suspense and uncertainty in which this departure had left her. Annie was not romantic or sentimental, but her feelings were strong, and they were at that moment wounded. She hardly spoke during breakfast, and answered very shortly the questions addressed to her. As soon as the meal was over, Mrs. Gerald drew Edgar aside, and tried to extract from him the reason of his departure, but she did not succeed. He would only repeat that he was obliged to go to London, and could not tell for how long. When his fly drove up to the door, he went to shake hands with Annie, who said, "You know, of course, that we shall be very glad to see you whenever you can come back, but I do not expect you will care to do so."

"You would not say that," he answered, "if you knew how happy it has made me to be here. There were many things I wished to say to you . . . . and as it is possible . . . ." (there was a little emotion in his voice which made Annie look at him with surprise), "as one never knows what may happen," he continued, "I thought I would just say this much. Do, dear Annie, think over some of the things we have talked about, and read the books I have left with you."

"I should like very much to be as good as you are," Annie answered in a softened manner.

"Do not talk of my being good, dear Annie; but pray that you may be led into all truth."

"Led into truth!" she said to herself, as he drove away. "But who is to lead me? I suppose he means God, as I am to pray for it. But God seems to lead him one way and Mr. Pratt another; for I am sure they both wish to know the truth, and to do what is right—they both pray a great deal. Oh dear me! What is the use of my reading about the Apostolical Succession, and the power of the

keys—I cannot make out who is right, and who is wrong."

In this desponding mood she sat down to her work, having, somewhat crossly, refused to play duets with Jane Conway. Mrs. Gerald was also very much annoyed. It had crossed her mind that Miss Rose had perhaps given a hint to Edgar's mother as to her wish that he should marry Annie, and that Mrs. Langdon (Mrs. Herbert Derwent had married again) might possibly have written to him on the subject. If so, his abrupt departure was perhaps in consequence of this letter. Perhaps he was attached, possibly engaged, to some one else! And she had been putting her own foolish ideas into Annie's head! She would have given anything to unsay what she had said! When a plan is likely to fail, people are apt to get unreasonably angry with themselves for having made it; that is, if they cannot find any excuse for being angry with anybody else. Mrs. Gerald did, indeed, begin inwardly blaming Miss Rose for having so quickly acted on her suggestion, taking no time to think—it was so like her. There were two ways of doing things—she

had no tact, no judgment. "Then why did you employ her in so delicate a matter?" retorted conscience, or something between conscience and temper—and the inward voice had the best of it. We generally test the merit of our actions by their results; and there are few persons good enough to feel as the holy Curé d'Ars did, and said when he had lighted his candle with a bank-note, that the greatest mistake is not half so bad as the smallest possible sin. Mrs. Gerald was in a state of conditional anger with herself, Edgar, Miss Rose, and Mrs. Langdon. *If* what she feared was true, she could not forgive herself or any of them.

After luncheon, the newspapers arrived by the second post. Miss Conway was reading the "Times," whilst the rest of the party wrote their letters. She suddenly looked up, and said to Jane—

"Now I am sure I know why Mr. Derwent has gone to London."

Mrs. Gerald instantly asked what she meant, and then Eliza felt sorry she had made the remark. Even sensible people sometimes speak without thinking; but

there was no help for it, and so she answered—

"I see the cholera has broken out very badly in the Borough, and particularly in the district where I know he visits the poor."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Gerald, "I hope he will not go there now."

Eliza made no answer.

Annie said, "I am certain he will. He was talking last night about the poor, and the sort of feeling people ought to have about them; and this is just the kind of thing he would do."

Mrs. Gerald felt in one respect greatly relieved and pleased also with Annie's manner of speaking about her cousin; though anxious about his being exposed to the danger of catching the cholera, she was less distressed and better satisfied with herself than a moment ago. So she listened complacently to Eliza's next remark.

"You can have no idea how much good he has been doing in London ever since his return from abroad; he has set before his eyes the example of the saints in all ages, and his continual object is to imitate their

charity, and help to rekindle the same spirit in our Church. There is not one of our Anglican Sisterhoods or Houses of Charity that he does not in some way or other assist. Sometimes he sits up all night himself with sick people."

"How strange!" Annie said.

"Strange in one sense certainly, because so few persons act in that way. But is it not *most* strange that, considering what our Lord has said, there should be Christians who do nothing at all for the poor?"

"Oh, yes; of course people ought to be charitable."

"In the account of the day of judgment, are not works of charity made the criterion of a man's prospect of salvation?"

"Yes; I have often thought that chapter a very uncomfortable one. Lizzie, do you think Edgar would like me to give him some money for those poor sick people he goes to see?"

Eliza's face brightened. "Yes, I am sure he would," she answered. "People who do not see or hear much of the poor, little know what a suffering it is to be constantly

witnessing misery without the power of relieving it—to feel how much could be done with a little money, and not to have it to give, whilst it is squandered in every direction, and lavished on dress and luxury. If your cousin is, as I am fully persuaded he is, visiting the cholera patients, often and often he must meet with persons who would die with resignation if they knew their orphan children would be provided for. He finds, no doubt, cases of terrible misery wherever he goes."

Annie went up to Mrs. Gerald, and said, "Aunt Gerald, will you immediately send for me to Edgar fifty pounds."

"Yes, my love; but you must write to him yourself, and I will enclose a cheque for you."

Annie sat down, and wrote with a full heart:—

"Dear Edgar,—I wish more than ever that I could be as good as you, though I am afraid if I think ever so much over the things you said to me about being High Church, that I shall not understand them. I send

you some money for the poor people Eliza says you go and see in London.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ANNIE."

"You must let me help you, Lizzie, with your poor people when you go back to London," she whispered to her friend.

"Thank you, dear," Eliza answered.

"And now, darling," said Mrs. Gerald, when she had sealed the letter to Edgar, "do put on your things. We must drive to Marchbanks; we really cannot put it off any longer. They arrived, you know, three weeks ago, and Lady Emily wrote to me four days ago that she felt now quite well enough to see me."

"Very well," Annie said, with a look of resignation. "If you all knew how I hate making new acquaintances, you would pity me. What is Miss Flower's Christian name, Aunt Gerald?"

"I don't know, my love. Now, do get ready."

At last they started. During the whole drive Annie was thoughtful, and spoke very

little. She was not shy, but she had a sort of *sauvagerie* as the French call it, which made her dislike to meet strangers. But besides this, her aunt's thoughts and her own were much engrossed by the conversation about Edgar which had just taken place, and the idea of the danger he was running in visiting the cholera patients in an infected district. Mrs. Gerald mused on this subject with the nervous apprehension of one who had known many losses and sorrows. Annie dwelt upon it with comparatively little fear. Young persons untried by grief do not realize danger; or, if they do, it is with a kind of excitement which hides from them the amount of suffering involved in it. Still, whilst picturing to herself her cousin in a sick-room kneeling by the side of a dying person, she thought of death more seriously than she had ever done before. She had never communed much with herself, but had taken life day by day, as it came before her, with all its little pleasures, vexations, and anticipations. Death seemed immeasurably far off, and heaven something more distant and unreal still. Perhaps she had with

regard to it a little of the feeling of the farmer, who said with a deep sigh to a fellow traveller who happened to speak of it, "Ah, well, I suppose we must all come to that at last." It was a matter of course she should go to heaven some day, but luckily not for a long time to come. But now the appearance of the cholera in London, and Edgar actually exposing himself to the risk of catching it, seemed to change a little the position of things. It really made her think that people did die, young as well as old people; but she did not communicate any of her thoughts to her aunt, only as they turned into Marchbanks Park she asked her if she had put her letter to Edgar into the letter-box. When satisfied on this point, she said, "Marchbanks is not nearly so pretty a place as Holmwood."

"Is that a new discovery you have made?" Mrs. Gerald answered.

"It never struck me so much before."

"I think Edgar has taught you to appreciate Holmwood."

Annie smiled. And now that Mrs. Gerald was relieved from the fear that her nephew's

departure had been the result of the message she had wished conveyed to him, all her self-reproach vanished, Miss Rose was acquitted, and she began again to pursue her favourite object with the same ardour as before.

Lady Emily Hendon was at home, and Mrs. Gerald and Annie were shown into the drawing-room, which looked more habitable and cheerful than when its use was confined to the days on which Mr. Hendon gave dinner parties. An invalid couch, books besides those in the book-case, flowers on all the tables, and two little dogs in two separate arm-chairs, were new features in the room, which was now exclusively occupied in the morning by Lady Emily. Twenty-three years had elapsed since she and Mrs. Gerald had met, and both seemed affected with the sense of the changes that had occurred since they had last seen each other in that house. They sat a moment without speaking, a silent pressure of their hands expressing what was passing through their minds. Mrs. Gerald then said, "This is my niece, Annie Derwent."

Lady Emily shook hands with her, and

exclaimed, "I am so sorry Ita is not at home."

Though Annie had disliked the idea of a new acquaintance, she was perverse enough to feel disappointed that she should not after all see Miss Flower.

"If you go into the garden, my love, perhaps you will meet her," Lady Emily added.

Annie did not quite like to be told like a little girl to go into the garden, or to be called "my love" by somebody she hardly knew. But on the whole, as it was pleasanter to stroll out of doors even if Miss Flower was not to be seen, than to sit with the two friends, feeling herself in the way, she took the hint, walked out into the shrubbery, and went to a bench where a shawl and a book indicated that somebody had been sitting. She looked at the title-page of the volume, and saw that it was a French translation of Fabiola. A little picture of the sort that Catholics keep in their Prayer-books fell at her feet; this one represented a heart with a sword running through it. Annie hastily replaced it between the leaves,

with a feeling which was almost like one of fear and disgust; she saw it was something religious, and most minds recoil from what is new and strange to them on that subject. She had hardly done so when she saw a small figure hastening towards her, whom she, of course, knew must be the young lady of the house—the little Miss Flower she was to make acquaintance with. "It is rather a bore without any one to introduce me," she thought; however, starting up, she advanced a few steps towards the breathless girl, who had been running to meet her. They both smiled and shook hands. "You are Miss Derwent, I suppose?"

"Yes, and you, Miss Flower?"

"I am Ita; nobody calls me anything else. Will you sit here, or come back into the house?"

"Just as you like. It's just the same to me."

"We can, if you please, stay out till the clock strikes five, and then go in to tea. Mamma must be very glad to see Mrs. Gerald. She is such an old friend of hers."

Annie took at once a fancy to her new

acquaintance. A most engaging little being Mr. Hendon had said she was four or five years before, and Annie thought she certainly continued to be so now. What was she like? When the Conways put that question to Annie on her return home, she said, "I am sure I cannot tell; she is nice all over." And this was perhaps the best description she could give of Ita. She had the sweetest, prettiest, dearest face imaginable—perfectly brown eyes, shaded with dark black curling eyelashes, a little round nose with no particular shape at all, the loveliest small mouth, with a charming smile that rippled over her face, dimpled and soft as a child's. Her hair was of a colour that matched perfectly with her eyes. Her whole figure, her hands, her feet, were exactly of the size that suited her face. There was not anything about her that was not pretty, though nothing perhaps was beautiful. Her voice and her laugh had a pleasant sound in them which made one think of the low twitter of birds in hedges. Three French words, were applicable to her: she was *mignonne*, *spirituelle*, *caressante*, and yet she was not like a Frenchwoman. "Lovely" is perhaps

the English word which would best describe little Ita. As soon as Annie saw her she had a singular feeling that her face was somehow familiar to her, though, at the same time, she could not remember having ever set eyes on one so engaging. Almost for the first time in her life she felt a wish to make herself agreeable.

"I am so glad to know you," Ita said. "Mr. Hendon promised me I should, and I have been looking forward to it so much."

"We should have called last week, but the rain prevented us."

"And mamma is scarcely ever well enough to drive out."

"Is this the first time you have been in England?"

"Yes; I have lived all my life abroad."

"Where?"

"Almost always at Mentone."

"Where is that—in Italy?

"No, not exactly. We say we are not Italian, French, or Piedmontese. We are Mentonese?"

"*We*," said Annie, smiling. "Are *you* Mentonese?"

"I cannot tell what I am," Ita answered, blushing a little. "I know I love Mentone as if it was my native place."

"Oh, I am sorry for that; I am such a thorough Englishwoman."

"In time, I dare say I shall grow fond of England. I can fancy that the country about here may be very pretty."

"Can't you *see* it is?" Annie answered, in an offended tone of voice.

"It has rained a great deal, you know, since I have been here," Ita rejoined, with one of her pretty smiles.

"And does it never rain at Mentone?"

"Oh yes; it pours sometimes for days together, and everybody is so glad. But when once the rainy season is over, the sun shines for weeks, and sometimes for months, without ceasing.

"I hope you will soon come to Holmwood."

"Is that the name of the place where you live in?"

"It is my own place."

"Your own, because you love it?"

"No, because it belongs to me, and I

shall like to show it you. Everybody thinks it pretty."

"Thank you, I should like very much to see it. You are so kind to me, I feel already as if I was not speaking to a stranger."

"It is very odd you should say so. I cannot get it out of my head that I have seen your face somewhere before. Are you only just come to England? I thought we might, perhaps, have come across each other in London."

"Oh no; I never was there except for a few days."

"Are you going to stay here long?"

"I do not know. It will depend on mamma's health; she is very delicate."

"Did you always stay at Mentone?"

"In the summer we generally went to the Italian lakes or to Switzerland."

"How much you have travelled!"

"Not very much, I think. I should like to go to Rome and Jerusalem."

"I have never been abroad since I was quite a little child. I can just remember Nice, and a garden with orange-trees I used to play in."

"Mentone is close to Nice, and it has

beautiful orange-trees and such lovely olive woods. I wish I could show you Mentone—its dark blue sea and its lovely mountains. It is my own dear place, not because it belongs to me," this Ita said smiling, "but because I love it so much; I would rather live there than anywhere in the world—everything is so pretty—the sky, the sea, the flowers, and the people's faces."

"Have they dark eyes and brown skins like the Italian boys we see in London?"

"No, they are not very dark. Some of the women have blue eyes like yours, and black hair. You are very like some of the Mentonese girls."

"I hope as you are so fond of them that it will make you fond of me."

This was a sort of speech Annie had never made to any one before. She was quite surprised at herself, and still more so when in return Ita kissed her. It was done so gently and simply, just as a child gives a kiss instead of saying "Thank you," that she was touched and pleased. The clock struck five, and the two girls went into the drawing-room. Ita was introduced to Mrs. Gerald,

and brought her a cup of tea. When she gave it into her hands, and said something about the pleasure it was to have made acquaintance with Annie, there was a charm in her manner that immediately struck Mrs. Gerald. Whenever she saw for the first time a young person of Annie's age, her first impulse was to compare them. During all the rest of the visit she seemed unable to take her eyes off Miss Flower. Perhaps she thought that her sort of beauty was so different from her niece's that nobody but herself would think of comparing them, or else that her manner possessed exactly the sort of charm which was wanting in Annie's; for intense as was her worship of her niece, she was keenly sensible of certain deficiencies in that idolized being. She was so absorbed in watching the two girls that it made her quite absent; Lady Emily's languid remarks were scarcely attended to. It would have been difficult to say if it was with jealous or admiring eyes that Mrs. Gerald noticed Ita's winning, feminine, graceful movements—the way in which she unconsciously sat or stood in the attitude which an artist would have

appreciated, her pretty manner of speaking to Lady Emily, even the engaging playfulness with which she coaxed the two little spaniels that jumped on her knees, as if they were as fond of her as Mrs. Gerald felt everybody was likely to be.

"Ita, have you and Miss Derwent been taking a walk?" Lady Emily asked.

"No, mamma, we have been making friends," was the answer; and the smile with which this was said contrasted with Annie's stiff silence. Not but that her smile was sometimes very beautiful also; it came and went like a sudden flash of light, and was very different from the dimpling sweetness of Ita's laugh. Whatever was the reason of Mrs. Gerald's absence of mind, it was so remarkable that Annie, very unobservant of such things in general, could not help noticing it.

As they were driving home, Annie said, "Don't you think Miss Flower very pretty? Why, I wonder, is she called Ita? Do you suppose it is the short for anything?"

"I do not know, dear love."

"She does not call Lady Emily mamma, but *mamma*, in the Italian way."

"Does she?"

"How long has she lived with Lady Emily?"

"I do not know. Mr. Hendon, writing from the Baths of Acqui about fourteen or fifteen years ago, said his sister-in-law was there, and had brought with her a pretty little creature, who could speak nothing but a kind of *patois*."

"I am sure I have seen somebody like her before, though I cannot remember where. I don't mind how much we see of her now. I never took so great a fancy to any one."

In the evening, Annie gave the Miss Conways an account of her visit, and of the minutest circumstances connected with it, not forgetting the French Fabiola and the strange little picture within its leaves.

"If this Miss Ita is an admirer of Fabiola," Eliza said, "we should sympathize on one point at least."

"I hope she is not a Roman Catholic," Jane exclaimed, who in most points, and about religion particularly, liked to show her

independence, by strenuously opposing her cleverer sister's opinions.

"Oh, I hope not," Annie cried; and, as Eliza did not speak, she insisted, as she was fond of doing, on making her give an answer. "Don't you hope, Eliza, she is not a Catholic?"

"I wish you would say a Roman Catholic."

"Oh, well, a Roman Catholic, if you like; it all comes to the same."

"That is just your mistake; it makes all the difference. I wish everybody was Catholic . . . ."

"And nobody Roman Catholic?" interrupted Annie.

"No, I do not exactly mean that; and I was going to say about this young lady, that I could hardly express a wish on the subject, unless I knew to what country she belongs. . . . ."

"She is English, of course. She is called Miss Flower. Ita must be her pet name."

"Well, even granting that she *is* English, if she has always lived abroad, and never had an opportunity, which is often the case, of

knowing what are the true principles of the Church of England, it is, I think, questionable whether it would not be better for her to have been brought up a Roman Catholic than in the heretical Protestant ideas unfortunately prevalent amongst so many members of our branch of the Catholic Church."

"Well, I did not expect," Jane replied, "that you would go so far as that—that you would wish anybody to worship a wafer and adore the Virgin Mary."

"Oh, Jane, you cannot know what pain you give me," Eliza exclaimed, an indignant blush rising to her cheeks, and her voice trembling with emotion. "It is these ignorant and unjust accusations against the Church of Rome, which drive so many persons out of our purer Church into her communion, which in this country is schismatical. Roman Catholics may disfigure the truth sometimes by abuses and excesses, but they are right in all essential points of doctrine; they adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and a belief in the Real Presence has always been maintained by our Church."

"Mr. Pratt does not think so," Annie retorted. "Do you know what the Church teaches better than a clergyman?"

"Well, Annie, I do not wish to say anything presumptuous, or anything that would give you pain—but I have been taught by those who have gone deeply into the question, men of great learning and ability, and very holy men too, that the true doctrines of the Church of England have been fearfully misunderstood and misrepresented by men of Mr. Pratt's age, who lived at a time when heretical principles prevailed almost universally in our Church . . . ."

"I am sure Mr. Pratt would never misrepresent anything," Annie indignantly exclaimed; "and I believe he is just as good a man as any of those you speak of."

"I am sure he is a good man," Eliza said with an earnestness that brought tears into her eyes. "I only think he is deceived on some points. The ideas I mean quite took possession of the Anglican Church at one time, like Arianism and the Donatist heresy invaded the Catholic Church in former times,

so that at one moment hardly any bishop held by the truth except St. Athanasius."

Now, Eliza had it all her own way. She had gone far beyond the depth of her companions. Annie could only say, "I wish Mr. Pratt was here to argue with you," and Jane fell foul of St. Athanasius; "I should not at all have liked to be on his side, for I think his creed is very uncharitable. When mamma," she said, "was well enough to go out, she would never go to church when it was read."

"Mr. Pratt never reads it," Annie said.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Eliza.

There was a silence—Jane folded up her work and went away. Annie was occupied with her drawing and looking grave.

"I am afraid, dearest Annie," Eliza said, "that you are more disposed to agree with Jane than with me on these subjects."

"I don't know. I don't want to side with any one. Since you and Edgar have talked to me about these things, I am puzzled what to think. You take these Church principles so much to heart, and you are both so good . . . ."

"Oh no, he is good, but I am not."

"Now don't make me angry, Eliza, by saying what you really can't think. Look at Jane, look at me—you must see that we are neither of us one half as good as you are."

"Perhaps I do more useful things, and see more plainly than you do truths which, when once admitted, oblige us to act up to them. But then nobody but God knows how much or how little we each of us correspond to the amount of grace He gives us, or how far what looks like goodness may be the result of natural tastes and inclinations. It is only when we die that we shall know what we really are."

Annie laid down her pencil and exclaimed, "Yes, that is just what I mean, what I was going to say. There is, I am sure, something in your religion which goes deeper and takes a greater hold of you than is generally the case with people, as far as I can see."

"I think I can tell you, Annie, what that something is."

"What?"

"Catholic teaching — the teaching of Christ's Church."

"But what Church do you mean?"

"The Catholic Church wherever it exists—the great tree whose branches extend all over the world. Each little leaf growing on that tree draws its spiritual life from the particular branch to which its baptism has attached it. To us the English Church is that branch—for a long and dreary time it has been languishing, and disfigured by ugly excrescences; but now the sap is beginning again to flow, and the true Catholic spirit to revive amongst us. The duty of every one of her children in this country is to help on that revival by promoting, as much as possible, the spread of Catholic doctrines and practices."

"But I thought you said it was the teaching of the Church that made people good."

"So I did."

"But now you say it is her children that are to make *her* good—that they are to help her to teach what is true. But, then, how are they to know what *is* true?"

"The creeds, the Prayer-book, the general consent of antiquity testify to Catholic truth."

"Mr. Pratt says not."

Eliza felt a sensation which, in a less good and less well-educated person might have betrayed itself, perhaps, by some exclamation such as "Hang Mr. Pratt!" but she only coloured a little, and answered: "If you choose to pin your faith upon what one particular person says, it is useless to argue."

"How many persons do you build yours upon?"

"No particular number. I receive the teaching of the Catholic Church."

"But who tells you what its teaching is?"

"Those who have deeply studied it."

"But there are other people, I suppose, who have deeply studied it too, and don't agree with them. You told me the other day that the Roman Catholics had added a lot of new things to the teaching of the Church. How do you know that they are wrong, and those who say so right?"

"The persons who tell me so are my own appointed teachers?"

"Well, Mr. Pratt is *my* appointed teacher —I don't see why I'm not to believe him."

The clock struck seven, the dressing bell rang, and the argument ended—fortunately, perhaps, for the cleverest of the two disputants.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days later on Annie received the following letter from her cousin:—

"DEAREST ANNIE,—I was so busy last week that I could only briefly acknowledge the receipt of your kind note and the cheque enclosed in it. I must write now more at length: in the first instance, to thank you from my heart for that welcome gift, which has enabled me to relieve much suffering, and afford many comforts to the sick and dying. What pleased me most was that you should have thought of doing this unasked. It was far, far better than if I had made the request, and you had, however good-naturedly, complied with it. We feel alike, I am sure, on many points, and I do not despair of bringing you one day to think as I do with respect to

those principles which are the ruling ones of my life, and have opened as it were a new world to me. From the time I began to know anything about religion up to the age of twenty, I lived quite unconscious of the spiritual treasures which the Church of England has it in her power to bestow upon her children; I did not in the least realize its relation to my soul or my duties towards her: the whole of her sacramental system was a dead letter to me. Baptism seemed no more than the ceremony of admission into the Christian body; the word *Church* conveyed to me no other idea than that of a society which met together for public worship once a week—of the supernatural effects of baptism on the soul I never dreamed. In the same way the power of the keys, the commission by God of an absolving power to man, was perfectly unknown to me as existing in our Church; and, yet more, that divine and awful gift, the Holy Eucharist, which Alexander Knox, the parent of the great Catholic revival in this country, discerned and described as the *sine qua non* of a true Christian faith; justly observing that if we did not

possess Christ's real presence amongst us, we were less favoured than the Jews of old, who in the cloud and in the ark did enjoy an actual real presence of God, leading them through the desert, and abiding with them in the promised land; that sacred mystery appeared to me only in the light of a mere commemoration, a devout ceremony, but not the real dwelling of an incarnate God on our altars and in our hearts. It was at Oxford that I began to hear of Catholic principles in our Church, and to associate with those whose belief and whose lives were influenced by them. I soon felt that this was the creed I was in need of. Once or twice in my boyhood books had fallen into my hands which had caused the thought to pass through my mind that Roman Catholics had helps in their religion which we did not possess in ours. I had coveted these helps, and mentally exclaimed, like Dr. Newman, before his apostasy, 'O that thy creed were sound, thou Church of Rome.'

"The world was beginning to display to me its attractions; temptations met me at every turn; I wanted not merely to be

warned in a general way against its dangers, but to be armed against them; I felt the need of a stimulus to enter the narrow path, of a helping hand to guide and support me along it; above all, I wanted a divine love to put in the place of that of self—a love which would be as fervent as a human love, and the object of which should be within reach of my soul. I yearned for that nearness to God which Roman Catholics seemed to me to enjoy, though I recoiled with intense dislike from some of their doctrines and practices, and had then an instinctive feeling, as I now have a settled conviction, that I could never join their communion. Judge then with what rapture I hailed the new ideas about the English Church, which were then presented to me. I remember exclaiming, with intense joy, after reading some of the High Church publications of the day, 'This is beyond my hopes; this is what I have longed for without knowing that it existed—Catholicism without Popery; a new religion, but one which does not oblige me to forsake the churches I have prayed in since my childhood, to part company with my mother and

my friends, or to separate myself from our thoroughly English National Church, and yet which offers everything I have been tempted to covet in Romanism, and opens to me the accumulated treasures of the universal Church, purified from the dross which human infirmity has attached to them.'

"These anticipations have been fulfilled. I travelled abroad after leaving Oxford; I have lived and worked in London since my return. Whilst on the Continent, I found I could enjoy much in the devotions and services of the Roman Catholic Church, even while I clung with increasing earnestness to that purer Church which is reviving in our own land. The writings of the Fathers and the lives of saints inspired me with an ever-increasing love for Catholicism, and detestation of the Protestant heresy, which has so long disfigured and blighted our Anglican faith. When I returned to London I found, to my great delight, that, in several of our churches, Catholic doctrines were openly taught, Catholic devotions revived, the daily service adopted even where the true faith had not yet made decided progress, and the

Eucharistic sacrifice offered up with a distinct recognition of its propitiatory character. Religious houses were opened also, and persons were consecrating themselves by vow to the service of God and the poor. I cannot tell you with what ardour I entered into this movement; how I felt I had something real to live for, that the Church of England was the true home of my soul, and my one object in life to assist in the development of her true character. But this object is not one of easy attainment; a faltering heart, an uncertain aim, will not advance it. We must be prepared to pursue it in the midst of darkness, gloom, reproach, and discouragement. Our loyalty to the Church of our baptism must be staunch, unflinching, persevering; no disheartening difficulties within must shake our faith in our spiritual Mother, no seductions from without must allure us from her bosom. Like the youth in Longfellow's poem, who bore through snow and ice the banner with that strange device, 'Excelsior,' we must endure to pass through a frozen region on our way to the summit we shall one day reach. Our Church has been shorn

of its beauty, of its riches—I speak, of course, of spiritual riches—but it is pure; it has kept clear of the superstitions and errors which have so fatally beset the Church of Rome, and on that point our filial feelings may justly exult. Yes, we must be true to the Church of England: many false, weak, deluded persons have abandoned her, exchanging an arduous struggle and a lofty aim for a faithless ease—a noble strife for the self-gratification of a wayward impatience. But I, Annie, will never forsake the English Catholic Church. I have nailed my colours to her mast; I have blended, in one intense feeling, my devotion to her, and my passionate love of my own country. In our cathedrals and colleges, and above all in our beautiful parish churches, I see the pledges of her future restoration to Catholic truth and beauty, and often find myself addressing to England, dear England, the words of Ruth, 'My people shall be thy people, thy God my God.'

"What a grave letter, dear Annie! But the truth is that I have, since I left you, seen several persons on the brink of eternity. I have seen peaceful death-beds and

dreadful ones, and 'cela donne à penser,' as French people say. I met Miss Rose yesterday at my mother's, and had a long talk with her about dear Holmwood. Do write again and tell me what you think of all I have been telling you. Till the cholera disappears, I cannot bring myself to leave these poor people. Pray that I may be able to prove of real use to some of them.—Your affectionate Cousin,

"EDGAR DERWENT."

"P.S.—Dear Annie, I cannot close this letter without telling you of a thought which has been pressing more and more on my mind since I have had an opportunity of judging of the great want there is of clergymen devoted to our Church, and anxious to instil her true principles into our people. I think I might do much more good as a clergyman than in any other way, and have almost made up my mind to take holy orders. I did not mean to have mentioned this to you at present; but, on the whole, I prefer doing so, and should very much wish to know your opinion on the subject."

Annie was very much perplexed — the

postscript especially "lui donnait à penser," though not in so serious a sense as the death-bed scenes Edgar had been so impressed with. The idea of his becoming a clergyman was not at first agreeable to her; it did not seem natural, and she had a feeling that it would not be quite proper that the mistress of Holmwood should be a clergyman's wife. The two ideas did not go together. There was, however, no real reason against it, and, on second thoughts, she did not see why Edgar should not be a clergyman if he wished it, or why it should be an obstacle to their marriage, should such a thing ever be in question; on the contrary, among those she had lived with it was generally assumed that a wife was almost a necessary condition of usefulness for a clergyman, and, though there had been a time when she would have disliked the idea of that kind of life, it did not now seem unattractive to her. Edgar's last visit had changed her way of thinking in many respects. And then she recollected that in the course of a few years it must of necessity happen that dear old Mr. Pratt should die, and the living of Holmwood would

be, her aunt had told her, in her gift. She would then, of course, give it to Edgar whether he was her husband or not; if he was her husband then, they could make Holmwood a perfect paradise for themselves and the poor.

Annie had made some progress during the last few weeks. A little while before she would have planned a Garden of Eden for herself, and, at most, two or three other individuals; but now, thanks to her cousin and Eliza Conway, she included in her castle in the air, alms-houses and schools, and, perhaps, a little hospital and a nurse, such as they had told her some friends of hers had established in a village near their home. Then she went on to think (Annie had never thought so much in her life before) that she should like to hear Edgar preach. When he talked about religion, and all he hoped and wished on that subject, she had often felt that it was very interesting to listen to him, and she could fancy that his sermons would be very beautiful. If he was one day the master of Holmwood and its vicar also, he would be able to make all the improvements he liked in the church. People

would admire him very much, they would say it was very good in a man who had married a rich heiress, to give up the world and live in retirement at Holmwood, devoting himself to his parishioners. The postscript of Edgar's letter had made her entirely overlook all that preceded it.

There is a strange indifference about doctrines amongst Protestants. As long as they can walk to the same church with their friends and relatives, that is to the same visible building, kneel down side by side and use the same form of prayers, they often seem not to care the least if their opinions are as wide as the poles asunder. One may believe that when the clergyman utters certain words our Lord really descends on the altar, and another that this is a gross superstition, a miserable idolatry; and yet as long as the outward semblance of union exists, nothing more is said than that so and so is very extreme in his opinions, or that so and so is very much against Puseyism. If the family is an affectionate and good-humoured one, these remarks are made in rather a playful manner with an amused smile. Yet

one would have supposed that it was a matter of deep and vital importance whether a stupendous miracle was continually taking place amongst us unacknowledged, denied, and neglected, or, on the other hand, adoration paid to a piece of mere bread.

It was that vague habit of mind, which results from the uncertain teaching of a Church that has no undoubted or undisputed tenets of its own, that made Annie so perfectly satisfied with the prospect of marrying one whose opinions were as opposed as possible to those in which she had been educated, and who differed from her old instructor on almost every point. It did not even occur to her that it would be wrong or a hardship on any one to transfer the spiritual charge of a congregation, which for nearly fifty years had been taught by Mr. Pratt to believe what he and she herself believed to be true, to the care of one who would teach them exactly the reverse.

This strange toleration of every kind of opinions, so that it is within the limits of the Anglican Establishment, is no doubt an advantage in the eyes of those who think that

women have no right outwardly to differ from their husbands in matters which concern their souls. The rights of parents, uncles, aunts, elder brothers, and sisters on this point are considered to vary according to circumstances; but, the husband's right being generally regarded as indisputable, it would be well, perhaps, now that there are two different religions in the English Establishment, to adopt the plan formerly followed in the Royal Protestant families abroad, and not, as has been seen by some recent examples, yet exploded—that is, of educating girls in no particular religion in order that they may be ready to adopt, when they marry, the one which is professed by their husbands. Indeed, among foreign Protestants, not of royal birth, this system is apparently acknowledged. Some years ago, a German young lady wrote to a friend to announce her marriage; after describing the merits of her future husband's character and position, she ended her letter as follows: "There is only one thing I regret. You know how long I have wished to be a Catholic, and I had always hoped, when I married, to have

been able to follow my inclination. But it unfortunately happens that Mr. —— is a Protestant; I must therefore submit to the will of God, and resign myself to continue one also."

In the afternoon of the day on which she had received Edgar's letter, Annie asked Eliza to take a walk with her, and contrived to lead the conversation to the subject of clergymen marrying. She remembered that her friend had expressed, one day, an opinion rather unfavourable to their doing so. She had taken no heed of it at the time, but now felt anxious to revert to it. Eliza seemed averse to commit herself at first on that point. She said she did not think it was always desirable, but celibacy should never be compulsory as in the Church of Rome. Is it not curious how young ladies will sometimes pronounce on points which it has taken the experience of ages, and the deliberations of councils under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, to decide?

"But then you think," said Annie, "that High Church people consider it most perfect not to marry?"

"As a general rule, but not in all cases," Eliza answered; "in the Greek Church priests marry, but, if their wives die, they cannot marry again, and no married man can be a bishop."

"And Roman Catholic priests never marry at all?"

"No, never—that universal prohibition is one of the abuses of the Church of Rome."

"In that case," Annie thought, "it will be a good thing for me to marry Edgar if he becomes a clergyman, because it will prevent him from ever becoming a Roman Catholic."

He had asked her to answer his letter—to tell him what she thought of all he had said. This was very difficult, because really about a great deal of it she had no thoughts at all, or at any rate, she did not know how to put what she did think into words. But this might be a good opportunity, perhaps, of giving him the sort of encouragement Mrs. Gerald had spoken of, and so she sat down and wrote this short letter:—

"DEAR EDGAR,—All you say about the

Church and your attachment to it, and the help it is to you, is very interesting. I suppose that about some things men and women do not feel quite alike. It would be so much pleasanter, and easier I think, and better for us, too, if we could be sure who is right and who is wrong. You are much more likely to be right than I am; but then I do not see why Mr. Pratt is not likely to know about these sort of things as well as you and your friends. If you both told me the same thing there would be no difficulty, it is the difference that puzzles me; you can't both be right. Sometimes I think that, perhaps, it does not much signify what people believe if they are good; but when I say that, Eliza tells me I am quite wrong, that there are very good Jews and Mohammedans, and yet that it must signify very much to be a Christian or not, to be baptized or not baptized; and then I really do not know what to say. If you become a clergyman, and especially if one day you should happen to be our clergyman here, perhaps you would in time persuade me to think as you do. It must be a very serious thing to become a clergyman,

and I suppose you will reflect a great deal before you decide. If you make up your mind to it I shall not be sorry. Aunt Gerald is writing to you; at first she did not seem pleased, but I think she is coming round to it. I wish you could come back to Holmwood, I shall get less fond of it again if you stay away a long time. I have seen Miss Flower, Lady Emily's adopted daughter, she seems a very nice girl.

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"ANNIE DERWENT."

A few days after this letter was sent the Miss Conways left Holmwood to join their parents by the sea-side. They spent one day in London on their way to Worthing. Mrs. Langdon, Edgar's mother, called on them in the morning, and asked them to dine with her and her husband that evening. She said they would be quite alone, but that Edgar would come in after dinner, and that he would be so glad to see them. Jane had arranged to go to the play that evening with one of her brothers, but Eliza was delighted to accept the invitation, and to have an oppor-

tunity of talking over with Edgar the many subjects of interest they had in common.

Mr. and Mrs. Langdon were one of those oddly matched pairs in each of which seems to abound the quality the other wants. She overflowed with good humour; he was crabbed and uncertain in temper: she had a wise way of saying foolish things; he had an arch clever way of talking nonsense. He would not have liked a sensible wife; it was a constant amusement to him to wrangle with Mrs. Langdon and puzzle her in argument, an easy triumph which did not, however, seem to lose its zest. He did not dislike his stepson, but yet could never resist making sarcastic remarks on what he considered his eccentricities; this would have irritated Mrs. Langdon, if anything could do so, for she worshipped her son and thought him in every respect perfect. During dinner there were a few skirmishes of this kind, but Mrs. Langdon had informed her husband that Eliza was quite of Edgar's way of thinking, and he was therefore too civil to say anything that would have displeased her. She was amused at his dry humour, and found the evening

was pleasant even before Edgar arrived. He came in at nine, looking pale and tired, but seemed charmed to see Miss Conway. After a few words of general conversation, Mrs. Langdon proposed to her husband to play at piquet in another part of the room. "What, my dear," he whispered as she led him away, "are they going to hold a council on Church affairs? She is a deaconess, is not she, or something of the kind?"

"No, my dear, you always make mistakes. It is the Protestants who have deaconesses, the English Catholics have sisters."

"Oh! then she is a sister?"

"No, she is nothing that I know of."

"But she is serious, is not she, as people used to say in my youth?"

"No, not more serious than she ought to be."

"And how much is that?"

"I really cannot answer that sort of question."

"No, my dear, I do not think you can, so will you cut."

In the meantime Edgar and Eliza did not begin by talking of the affairs of the Church.

They spoke first of Annie. "You like my cousin very much, don't you?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," she answered; "she is so good, so true. If once she can see life, its duties, and its objects in their real light, she will be more than commonly good. But I sometimes wonder that having been educated by so superior a person as Mrs. Gerald there should be something in Annie that gives one the idea that her mind has not been very much cultivated. Do you perceive this?"

"I understand what you mean, but I do not think this is quite the case. There is perhaps in her a slowness of apprehension which sometimes almost seems like a deficiency of intelligence; but I have often been struck by her good sense and the excellence of her understanding."

"Your visit had a great effect upon her. Even after those few days I could see that she was much less childish, that she thought more. I am sure you would have great influence over Annie if you saw more of her."

Edgar remained silent a moment, and

then said in a low voice, "How difficult it sometimes is to satisfy oneself as to which would be the most perfect of two lines of conduct."

"Yes," Eliza answered, "and there is nothing so trying in the world as perplexity. But others, and especially those who are used to guide and to direct us, often see more clearly than we do ourselves which course we should follow."

"I am in the greatest doubt at present on two of the most important points a man can have to decide upon. I cannot quite make up my mind whether to go into the Church or not, and in the next place whether, if I do so, I ought to marry. It may seem very strange that after so short an acquaintance I should speak to you so openly on such subjects as these; but, though I have not known you long, Miss Conway, I feel as if we were old friends and that I can open my heart to you without folly or indiscretion. On the first of the two points I mentioned I have nearly come to a decision. As I have taken my degree at Oxford I can be ordained with very little delay; and it seems to me that

every man who enters our Church, with a full sense of the duties and responsibilities of a priest, is lending strength to the cause of truth."

"Oh, yes!" Eliza exclaimed, "it is an inestimable blessing that such persons should take holy orders. I am very, very thankful that such is your intention."

"What has forced the thought upon me has been the sight of so many poor creatures dying without absolution. Whilst the Papists, as a matter of course, sent for their priests and received the last sacraments, our poor people, in the first place, had never, many of them, been taught to think anything of confession and absolution, or cared to send for a clergyman; and, secondly, if they were visited on their deathbeds by an Anglican priest, alas! it was often only to have a few prayers and verses of the Bible read to them, and not a word said about confession. Indeed, in one instance, a poor dying man, who had some wish to confess, was told to confess to God and not to man, and actually dissuaded from seeking sacramental absolution. On another occasion,

when a clergyman was going to administer Holy Communion to a sick person, he spent some time in explaining that our Lord was not present in the sacrament as he said Roman Catholics falsely teach. It is heart-breaking to see God's ministers so utterly ignorant of the treasures of grace they hold in their hands; and baptized persons equally unconscious of their rights to those blessed privileges. I longed during those days, when death was striking on every side those poor sufferers, I pined to possess the right of speaking, of acting as a priest, and then came the thought that God was calling me to devote my life to the sacred ministry."

"I have no doubt it was an inspiration, dear Mr. Derwent."

"But then comes the second question. At the very moment that I was anxiously turning over in my mind that important subject, I happened to meet here Miss Rose, Annie's governess. I have known her, of course, all my life, and we have always been great friends. We happened to be left alone together for nearly an hour, and had a

long conversation, in the course of which I heard, to my infinite surprise, that my Aunt Gerald's favourite wish is that I should marry Annie! It had never crossed my mind that such a thing would be possible, that she would be content to see her marry a man as poor as myself. I have always been very fond of Annie, and since my last visit to Holmwood have felt an interest in her which might easily grow into a warmer affection. Of course there is everything in this idea that would naturally attract and tempt me—my attachment to Holmwood, the possession of great means of usefulness and influence, and also the thought that, if I succeeded in winning Annie's heart and became her husband, I should lead her to the knowledge of those truths which, for those I love as well as for myself, I value more than life. But then there comes the doubt . . . ."

"What doubt? What makes you hesitate?"

"I do not know. I scarcely think that a clergyman should—mind I do not say that he may not, not even that he ought not—but I doubt if he should marry, especially at a time

when all those who have the interests of the Church at heart, seem called upon to practise heroic self-denial."

"I admit," Eliza answered, "that there are great advantages in some cases in priests being unmarried . . . ."

"There is a growing feeling of that kind in our Church, I think."

"But are there not cases also which form an exception to the rule, if, indeed, it amounts to a rule, and yours seems to me to be precisely of that number. Are we not to consider the greater amount of good which can be effected in one way or in the other in each individual instance. The *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, which you were telling us the other day was the motto of the Jesuits? I am not inclined to like them, but I admire these words. And now tell me, do you think Annie would object to your going into the Church?"

"No, as far as I can judge by her letter. She even gives me a hint that I might become some day Vicar of Holmwood."

"Oh! my dear Mr. Derwent, if that could ever be realized, what a career of usefulness

would open to you! What we want are opportunities for the full development and carrying out of Church principles. If our people could see the effect and judge of the results of Catholic teaching, we might look to a wonderful increase of English Catholicism. I am, perhaps, biassed by that thought. Holmwood, with its beautiful old church and its ancestral home, exhibiting the ideal of Catholic worship and Christian domestic virtue, with all its sanctity and its poetry, would convert half the county!"

"Mind that, when I said Annie seemed to approve of my intention, I did not mean to imply that she gave me the least reason to suppose she would marry me. You know I might be Vicar of Holmwood when poor dear Mr. Pratt departs this life, and Annie be somebody else's wife."

"Not half the good would be done in that way as if you were her husband. And now as you have talked openly to me, I will in return speak openly to you. I have studied Annie's character, and I am quite convinced that with all her apparent strength of will and independence of opinion, she is very liable

to be influenced. I believe this is one of the reasons that makes Mrs. Gerald wish her so much to marry you. She has, for instance, seen Miss Flower only a very few times, but I can perceive that she would be easily guided by that girl."

"And is not she a good companion for Annie?"

"I hardly know her; I only saw her once. She is very pleasing, remarkably so. I could not help being fascinated by her manner; but I suspect what is indeed perfectly natural, as she has lived abroad all her life, that she has either no religion at all, or a very strong bias towards Roman Catholicism. It could hardly perhaps be otherwise, but it would not be the less a terrible danger for Annie. At present she is very ignorant about everything relating to the Church of Rome, and has the strongest prejudices against it; but, with her particular turn of mind, I should very much dread her hearing some of those insidious arguments which Papists use, to make it appear that the position of our Church is untenable; for sometimes she has seemed to come of her own accord to that mistaken conclusion, and

I found it very difficult to make her understand the real state of the case. When she is puzzled, she falls back on Mr. Pratt's teaching, which is the safer extreme of the two for the present, for she could not long remain satisfied with the vague, miserable barrenness of mere Protestantism. But an influence leading her in an opposite direction would be most dangerous. I look to your influence to counteract the effects of her intimacy with Miss Flower."

"I have not the least idea if there would be any hope of her accepting me."

"I should say there was every probability of it, and am sure, from what I saw during your visit, and still more so since your departure, that she is, to say the least, very much inclined to return your affection."

"I do not know," Edgar replied, with a smile, "that I can say that I am actually in love with her yet. At Holmwood I never thought of such a thing; but since the possibility of obtaining her has been placed before me, I find in myself some of the symptoms of that passion such as Shakespeare describes them, and when I see her next I am only afraid of

the malady taking too rapid a development. However, God knows I can say with truth that I would not accept the hope of this happiness which has been, as it were, offered to me, if I did not think it was His will I should accept it, or if it was to stand in the way of my following what I believe He has called me to—the sacred duties of a priest."

Some further conversation took place between these young people which it is unnecessary to relate. Eliza succeeded in dissipating Edgar's doubts as to the desirableness of a clergyman's marrying, at any rate in his own case. Though she had recommended him to consult a spiritual adviser on the subject, she had unconsciously assumed the office herself. It is not fools only who rush in where angels fear to tread, but good and clever people also, especially those whose training and habits of mind have not taught them that there are days and hours in men's lives, turning moments in their destinies, too awful, too sacred, for casual advice, for unconsidered counsel, for decisions taken anywhere but on their knees and in God's presence. Perhaps few people think enough of the fear-

ful responsibility of giving advice. More harm is sometimes done in this way than by acts of unkindness, or even perhaps by bad example. Especially if any possess the dangerous gift of influence, let them beware how by a few rash words they turn the scales in which the fate of a life, and of an immortal soul, may be trembling.

Edgar made up his mind that evening to try and win Annie. He said to himself, "Eliza is conscientious, sensible, and quite unprejudiced in the question. She thinks it would be the means of so much good, and I see that she is convinced Annie likes me." If he afterwards asked anybody else's advice, it was probably for the chance of its falling in with what he had previously resolved upon, not with the least idea of shaping his course according to its purport.

CHAPTER V.

THE intimacy with Ita Flower, which Miss Conway so much dreaded for Annie, was progressing rapidly. There were few days that they did not contrive to meet. Mr. Hendon's carriage, on the days that Lady Emily did not go out, was always at Miss Flower's disposal; and, if Annie had not driven over in the morning to Marchbanks, Ita was almost certain to appear at Holmwood immediately after luncheon. They soon became friends, though their dispositions, tastes, and characters were very different. Ita's imaginative and pictorial view of things amused Annie, whilst she in turn was interested by her friend's original turn of mind, and matter-of-fact remarks. As to Mrs. Gerald, she was strangely capricious with regard to their young neighbour. She used to complain of her coming

too often and monopolizing Annie's time; but, if she chanced not to appear for two or three days, she inquired why she stayed away, and seemed fidgetty till she came again, and was very inquisitive as to the long conversations they held together.

"What were you talking about, my love, during those two whole hours I saw you sitting in the shrubbery?" she one day asked her niece.

"Was it so long as that? It did not seem so. Ita has seen so many places, and known all kinds of people abroad; she tells me all sorts of amusing things."

"Has she spoken to you much about her childhood?"

"Yes, a great deal. I think I know as much about Mentone as if I had lived there myself."

"But does she remember anything of the time before she came there? Does she ever speak of her parents?"

"No; I asked her one day if she had always been with Lady Emily? She said, 'No—not always;' that she lived, when she was very little, at a cottage near the sea-side

somewhere, but that it seemed like a dream. I asked her if she was with her parents then, and I was sorry I had put that question to her, for she grew very red, and the tears came into her eyes. So I suppose they are dead. It was a foolish, thoughtless question; for, if they had been alive, she would not have been, I suppose, Lady Emily's ward."

"Do you know why she does not come to church? Is she a Roman Catholic?"

"No. I thought at first she was, and so I asked her. She said, 'No;' but that she had been very much used to go to Roman Catholic churches, and that she liked them much better than ours."

"That is the worst of English girls living abroad; they are influenced by what they see of the pageantry of the Romish service, and then they get to dislike our simple and beautiful form of worship."

"I told Ita that Edgar says we have lighted candles, and incense and flowers, in some of our churches now; but she says it is not those sort of things she cares about. I do not like talking to her about religion. I do

not know how to explain to her what Edgar says about our Church being Catholic."

"You are quite right, I think, to avoid that sort of conversation. No good can come of young girls discussing such subjects. I sometimes question, Annie, whether Miss Flower is a good friend for you."

"Oh yes, she is, Aunt Gerald, I like her very much. It is only now and then that we ever speak about religion. Oh! and now I want to know . . . . we are going to Carsdale next week, I suppose?"

"Yes; on Monday. The ball is to be on Thursday, and we stay till Saturday."

"Well; but Ita is asked—if she had only anybody to go with—and I want her to come with us."

"With us?"

"Yes; Lady Emily cannot go, of course, and it would be awkward for her to go with Mr. Hendon. I shall not amuse myself at all if she is not there. She and Edgar are the only two persons I like to be with now."

"And the poor Conways?"

"Well, I will tell you the truth. I like them, but not quite so much as I did before

they were staying with us. Eliza is too good for me, she bores me a little about schools and poor people; and Jane is rather tiresome when you come to see a great deal of her."

"But does not Edgar talk almost as much as Eliza of those sort of things?"

"No, not so incessantly, and he sometimes makes me laugh. I like to hear him talk, whatever the subject is. But now I want to know, will you take Ita with us to Carsdale?"

"I suppose I must, if Lady Emily asks me."

"You cannot think how fond she is of you, Aunt Gerald."

"Of me!" Mrs. Gerald exclaimed, with a sudden colour rushing into her face, "what *can* make her fond of me? I have scarcely said two words to her."

"Well, she says she does not know why it is, she has taken such a fancy to you. Only to hear your voice, or sit in the same room with you, is a pleasure to her. She is such an odd girl; she thinks that people have lived in some other world, or in this

one perhaps, at some former time; and that when we like or dislike people in some unaccountable way, it is because we have known them in some other state of existence."

"I never heard such nonsense, my love. It is, I suppose, some superstitious notion that she has learnt from Catholics."

"No; she says the Abate Somebody, whom she knows at Mentone, told her it was a false idea."

"Well, the sooner she gets it out of her head the better. You have, I am sure, too much good sense to listen to such absurdities."

"Those sort of thoughts never came into my mind. I was never much alone, you know; perhaps that makes a difference. Ita used to be hours and hours by herself, and she has told me that all sorts of painful ideas, and sometimes funny ones, occurred to her. She fancied all kinds of things, and held long conversations with imaginary people, and invented histories about them, when she was sitting in the olive woods, or on the seashore at Mentone. And then about religion she was so bothered, always wondering what

heaven was like, and how anything could last for ever. She often longed to talk to somebody about those things, but, if she said anything to Lady Emily, she cried, 'Oh, pray, my dear, don't talk of that, you make me nervous;' and her governess answered, 'Il m'est défendu, Mademoiselle, de vous parler de religion.' So she had to think it all out for herself."

"Her case has been an unfortunate one in that respect. She had better speak to Mr. Pratt, or perhaps Edgar's views might suit her. But talking of him, Annie, I must tell you that I heard from him this morning, and that he has quite made up his mind to become a clergyman. He has been to see the Bishop of ——, and, after a long conversation he had with him, it was settled that the bishop will ordain him privately early in September. I suppose he was struck by his zeal and earnestness, and the purity of his motives in entering the Church."

"Early in September! As soon as that! Then will he not meet us at Carsdale? I know they have invited him."

"He says he hopes to be there for two

or three days, and then he will go and stay with a clerical friend of his to prepare for his ordination. He speaks very beautifully on that subject, and very touchingly, too, about you, Annie. I do not think, when you meet again, that he will leave you long in doubt about his feelings."

"Oh, then, I hope we shall not meet at Carsdale."

"Why so?"

"Because I should not like him to speak of *that* anywhere but here. I would wish it to be on the terrace on a fine day, late in the afternoon. If he asks me to marry him, and I accept him, I shall be making him, as it were, a present of Holmwood; and I should like it to be looking as beautiful as possible, and then I should say, 'There, I give it you; it is yours.'"

"Why, Annie, I do not know you again! That is quite a poetical idea. But, my love, you seem to be always dwelling on that thought of giving him Holmwood. It is, after all, but a slight gift in comparison with your affection."

"No, not a bit of it. If I had not this

place he is so fond of to give him, nothing would induce me to marry him. He is twenty times better and cleverer than I am; he has a taste for all sorts of things I do not care at all about; he can express what he feels, and I cannot. If I love people ever so much I cannot tell them so. No, certainly. If I had only myself to give Edgar I would not accept him, but the possession of Holmwood, which he is so excessively fond of, will make up for my deficiencies."

When Edgar was describing Annie's character, he had said she was proud, and perhaps there was pride in the feeling she had just expressed, but there was also something touching in the humble estimate of herself which it implied. Mrs. Gerald felt this, and kissed her with deep emotion. Annie's manner of returning this caress had in it more kindness than warmth.

Mrs. Gerald, as usual, complied with her niece's wishes, and wrote to propose that Ita should go with them to Carsdale. The offer was gladly accepted, and on a lovely day towards the end of August they called for her on their way there. The two girls were

in high spirits. Ita exclaimed, as they went through a lovely glade full of magnificent trees, "Oh, how beautiful!" and, as Mrs. Gerald looked at her beaming face, she also mentally exclaimed, "How beautiful!" and leaning back herself in the carriage, she listened to the conversation that went on between her two companions. It was merry, full of girlish nonsense and fun. But no smile came on Mrs. Gerald's lips; once there were a few tears in her eyes. When they reached the park of Carsdale and came suddenly on a new and extensive view, Ita's cheeks flushed with delight; soon the house itself appeared in sight—a large stately building, standing in the midst of what looked like a boundless extent of flower-gardens, with fountains playing in the midst of the dazzling masses of colour, and bordered by a lake intersected with little green islands and floating clusters of the large-leaved water-lilies. In a transport of delight Ita seized Mrs. Gerald's hand, kissed it, and kept it a moment in her own. The hand so fondly held was quickly snatched away; she raised her soft eyes with a look of surprise and then cast them down. Mrs.

Gerald almost turned her back upon her, and smoothed Annie's hair, which had been blown about by the wind. Before she had done putting it to rights, they arrived at the house, and were shown into a drawing-room, where Lady Carsdale and her daughter, Lady Emma, were sitting with three or four other persons.

Lady Carsdale was a short, plump, good-natured-looking woman, full of the milk of human kindness, and on whom the cares and troubles of life seemed to have sat lightly. Though advanced in years there were no hard lines in her fair placid face, and her small blue eyes twinkled with incessant glee. She seemed satisfied with herself and the whole world, except when the world made a fuss about anything. This discomposed her, though nothing else did. "If people only took things quietly, nobody would be uncomfortable," she used to say. The principle was to a certain degree a good one, only Lady Carsdale's application of it was too general. Lady Emma was very unlike her mother, a slight shade of superciliousness was visible in her countenance, a perceptible

consciousness of being a person of consequence. There were two more ladies in the room, one of them was a Mrs. Harper, who had a sharp inquisitive face that seemed constantly asking a question; there was something in the very shape of her nose that reminded one of a note of interrogation, and her black eyes might have belonged to a detective officer. The other was Mrs. Walter Sydney, a lady of about thirty-seven or eight years of age, still pretty, and with a most attractive countenance. Her husband was an amiable-looking man, a great deal older than herself. Mrs. Gerald shook hands with her, and inquired after Mr. Sydney, her father-in-law, a very old gentleman, more than eighty years old, and then presented Annie to her.

Ita had no one to speak to. There was a gentleman sitting near her, but he went on reading the newspaper and did not change his position during the half-hour which elapsed before Lady Carsdale asked her guests the welcome question on such occasions, "Would not you like to see your rooms?" But he had nevertheless contrived

to gather in that time more information about the new comers than Mrs. Harper herself. Her curiosity was as active as Mr. Lorton's, but not under such good control. By not seeming to be on the watch, he discovered a thousand details which would have escaped a more unguarded observer.

There was a running current of jealousy going on between these two individuals. Nothing vexed Mr. Lorton more than to be told a piece of news by Mrs. Harper, and *vice versa*. Though each was glad to get every possible scrap of information, it was gall and wormwood to their feelings to find themselves in the case of being informed of a new fact by a rival collector. Ita, meantime, was quite satisfied with looking about the room. There seemed to her a whole world of beauty within those four walls. She was gifted (is it always a gift?) with an intense capacity for enjoyment, she took a keen delight in things which many people scarcely pay any attention to—which they would miss if taken away from them, but of the presence of which they are hardly conscious. The beautiful hot-house flowers in the recesses of

the windows, and even the pretty Dresden china figures on the chimney-piece, gave her pleasure; but, more than all, the pictures. Her glance wandered from the portrait of a knight in armour to that of a cardinal in his full robes; but when she caught sight of a group of ragged boys quarrelling over a melon, and then of a procession of Pilgrims on their way to St. Peter's, her ecstasy was such that she could hardly help jumping up from her chair. She tried to catch Annie's eye, but did not succeed; if she had, there would not, perhaps, have been much sympathy shown for her admiration of these works of art. She was in no hurry to move, there was still so much to look at; but everybody else was glad when Lady Carsdale led the way upstairs.

"We are quite a small party to-day," Lady Carsdale said as she stood for a moment in Mrs. Gerald's dressing-room. "My son and two of his friends, Mr. Bayham and Sir John Leislip, we expect by the next train. The Rockcastles are here; and Mrs. Wellersby—she is a Spaniard—and that clever Mr. Harman you met here last year are

coming to-morrow. They are all very comfortable people that one feels quite at one's ease with. The Sydneys you know very well? Oh, of course you do. They are nearer neighbours of yours than of ours. It is a great pity that they have become Roman Catholics. They are very nice people. Emma used to be very fond of Mrs. Sydney, but lately she has seen very little of her. Lord Carsdale, however, insisted on my inviting them. Mr. Sydney has always been a great friend of his. It is so useless to make a fuss about that sort of thing. I am for people thinking and doing what they like about religion, so that they leave others alone, and keep their opinions to themselves. Formerly, in this part of the world, people in society did not trouble their heads about what religion others were of. I remember one of my constant partners, when I was a girl, was a Roman Catholic, and I never had the least idea of it till long afterwards. Now Emma knows not only if her partners are Catholics or Protestants, but what churches they go to, and what views they have. In my days people rode, hunted, dined together,

and even married, without all the fuss that goes on now."

"As to marrying, dear Lady Carsdale," Mrs. Gerald answered, "I must say I am very much against mixed marriages. I would allow any amount of latitude in our own Church, but surely husbands and wives ought to be able to pray together."

"Oh, yes, of course it is much better; then there is no difficulty. I always said that, as Mr. Sydney became a Catholic, it was much better Mrs. Sydney should be one also. It makes things so much easier about children and everything."

"Yes, but then conversions, or rather perversions, to Popery are very sad. However, some people say that the best remedy will be the increase of Catholicism in our Church."

"Oh! I dare say. I believe that is what Emma thinks," Lady Carsdale replied. "I am sure I hope so." She would have hoped anything rather than have had an argument.

Mrs. Gerald had been suffering all day from neuralgia; she had struggled against it in order not to disappoint the two girls by

putting off their visit to Carsdale. But while dressing for dinner the pain increased so much that she was forced to remain in her room. Lady Carsdale kindly came to fetch Annie and Ita, and took them down with her to the drawing-room. It was a great disappointment to Mrs. Gerald not to see Annie make her appearance almost for the first time in society. She asked her to come up after dinner and tell her how she had got on. Annie did so.

"Whom did you sit by, my love?"

"Between Lord Carsdown and a clergyman whose name I don't know."

"Did you converse much with your neighbours?" Mrs. Gerald inquired, with her hand pressed on her forehead to still the pain.

"Oh, yes; Lord Carsdown talked a great deal."

"What about?"

"About riding, and his horses. He is so surprised I have never seen a race. He described to me how exciting it is. He said that two people he knew were once watching a race, and it depended on which horse won

if they were to be married or not. I wonder they could look at all. And sometimes people know they will be quite ruined, if one particular horse does not win. I am very glad Edgar is not a racing man."

"Do you think Lord Carsdown pleasing?"

"Yes, very pleasing; he has such an eager way of talking, and is so much struck by all one says. It amuses me when he thumps the table and cries, 'By Jove! you are quite right.' He said that five or six times at least during dinner."

"And your other neighbour?"

"I did not like him at all. He would tell me that Puseyites are very dangerous, insidious people, who are pulling down the Church of England, and that it is a dreadful thing that almost all the young men in these days who think seriously become Puseyites. He asked me if it was true that Edgar was going into the Church. When I said I believed he was, he shook his head and said he hoped he had not adopted those dangerous opinions, and went on arguing about it, which I hate, for though I cannot always agree with Edgar I cannot bear any one to find fault with him.

As soon as I could I turned to Lord Carsdown, and asked him about the horse they are going to lend me to ride."

"You will enjoy yourself here, darling?"

"Oh, yes, very much. We are going to have a round game to-night."

"Do not stay up here then. Give me a kiss, dear love, and do not think any more about me."

"How is your head?"

"Still very bad. Never mind. I hope you will be amused, dearest."

Annie kissed her aunt and left the room, shutting the door after her not quite so quietly as might have been desirable for a person every nerve of whose head was quivering with pain. But Annie did not know herself what headaches are, and had not imagination enough to realize what she had not felt.

A little while afterwards the door was opened again very softly, and the lightest possible footstep crossed the floor. It was Ita, who timidly came up to the sofa on which Mrs. Gerald was lying, and sitting down by her side, said in a low voice, "I

thought it would please you to hear how much my two neighbours at dinner admired Annie."

"Who were they?" Mrs. Gerald asked, raising her head from the pillow.

"Lord Rockcastle and Mr. Bayham, they both think her so handsome; and after we came out of the dining-room, Mrs. Sydney said the same thing. She is looking so particularly well to-night. And now I will not talk any more, but would you let me tie a handkerchief tightly round your head? It is the only thing that does mamma any good when she has a bad headache."

Mrs. Gerald smiled, and looked about for a handkerchief.

"I have brought a silk one, a very soft one," Ita said; and kneeling down by the sofa, she tied the handkerchief round Mrs. Gerald's head, and performed this little act in the quiet pleasant manner which gives to some people a peculiar talent for ministering to pain. This simple remedy afforded the throbbing temples some relief, and Mrs. Gerald remained for a few minutes motionless and silent, but a moment afterward she

said, "You had better go downstairs, my dear; do not let me keep you here."

"Do let me stay a little, I like so much to be with you."

"But Annie will miss you."

"I do not think she wants me, they are going to play a round game."

"The young people, you mean; you ought to be with them."

As she was saying this, Ita had slipped her arm under Mrs. Gerald's neck, and placed her head in a more comfortable position. "I see you have a talent for nursing," Mrs. Gerald said, with a smile; "you have really done me good."

"Have I? I am so glad." Ita hesitated a little, and then blushing, said, "I love you so much."

Mrs. Gerald was one of those persons to whom people seldom show affection; partly because there were not many who felt it, and also because those who did were apt to refrain from giving outward signs of that feeling, so greatly did the formality of her manner repel its expression. Ita's simple exclamation, and the little caress which accompanied

it, took her by surprise, and caused her a sort of agitation. There are, to use a common expression, strange ins and outs in the human heart, and especially in natures at once impetuous and reserved. Mrs. Gerald's passionate affection for Annie had never met with any return beyond a very matter-of-fact, proper, dutiful sort of regard. In ordinary cases this would have chilled and disgusted her, for she measured her likings for others very much by what is called in French *la toise personelle;* but this did not apply to the child who had been snatched from the grave in her infancy, and restored to her when she had thought never to see her again—to the girl whom she had watched, trained, and cared for with parental affection, in whom she had centred all her hopes, her pride, and her delight. She had always felt—more than she knew, perhaps; certainly more than she had ever acknowledged to herself—the want of tenderness in Annie's character, but it had never been on her she visited the pain it gave her. On the present occasion it was with Ita that she seemed vexed. Why should a mere stranger, one to whom she had only shown a

little casual kindness, express what Annie so seldom did—a warm affection for her. She felt almost angry at the contrast being forced on her notice, and there was a shade of annoyance in the manner with which she said, "Really, my dear Ita, I do not understand what I can have done to make you so fond of me in so short a time."

Like a sensitive plant bruised by a slight touch, not meant to hurt, but exquisitely painful, Ita felt one of those pangs which run, not like a dagger, but like a thorn, into the heart. She kissed Mrs. Gerald's hand; that little act of homage familiar to those who have lived much abroad, but which generally surprises English people, and then said, "I will go down to Annie."

Mrs. Gerald wished her good-night; she felt that she had been unkind, but if she had said anything it would have been too much or too little. When the door was shut and the young girl gone, she burst into tears.

The round game was going on when Ita slipped quietly into the drawing-room. A whist party had also been made up, and Lady Emma was playing on the pianoforte. Most

of the persons present seemed to think that the chief advantage of music was to help on conversation. Annie was very much engrossed with her hand at Commerce, and did not pay much attention when Ita whispered to her that Mrs. Gerald's headache was a little better; and, as Mrs. Sydney seemed the only person at that moment not engaged in any way, she went and sat by her. Mrs. Sydney was listening to the playing, but smiled and looked pleased as she made room for her on the sofa near the pianoforte. When the piece was finished, and some of the gentlemen came up to speak to Lady Emma, Mrs. Sydney said to Ita, "Are you fond of music?"

"Yes, very fond of it; but I am afraid I like a barrel-organ better than some kinds of playing on the pianoforte."

"A barrel-organ has its merits, I allow. Do you play yourself?"

"Not well; but I can remember tunes and play them from memory—I like my own playing as I do my own thoughts. Nobody else I think would."

The simplicity with which this was said,

made Mrs. Sydney smile, and she answered, "Perhaps I should. Will you try some day?"

"Yes, with great pleasure; but it is not *real* playing—not at all like Lady Emma's."

"She has a great deal of execution and taste, but it is not the sort of playing I care about. I believe that the sort I like has gone out of fashion; I only hear old people play now with a soft touch that seems to linger on the notes and to draw from them tones that are almost like speaking. My husband's mother used to play in that way."

"Oh yes; I know exactly what you mean. Lady Emily, too, played like that. When I was a child it was my delight to sit by the pianoforte and listen to her playing. I could have fancied she had velvet at the end of her fingers, and one tune followed another as if a bird was singing. I like that so much better than pieces and variations; it made me feel as if I was myself the instrument played upon. I do hope there will be a great deal of music in heaven. Do you think there will?"

"I suppose all that is beautiful and

charming on earth is a foreshadowing of the enjoyments of heaven: as beautiful scenery, I often think, must be a relic of Paradise. But Holy Scripture says that we can make to ourselves no idea of heaven."

"Almost everybody that believes there is a heaven seems to make sure of going there."

"Too sure, perhaps."

"Have you ever met with anybody who really longed to leave this world, not because they were unhappy in it, but because they wished to go to heaven?"

"Yes, I know that many do, and I have seen it myself in one instance."

"Was it a young or an old person?"

"A young person."

"And one who was happy on earth?"

"She had known much sorrow, but it had passed away, and at last she had everything to make her happy. . . . ."

"Ah, but that is different from being happy!"

Mrs. Sydney smiled sadly. "You are right; but I think my sister, for it is of her I am speaking, was happy during the last years

of her life; but still she longed, intensely longed, for heaven."

"Are you speaking of that beautiful Mrs. Neville, whom Mrs. Gerald told us was the loveliest person she ever knew."

"Yes; she was my sister."

"Was she not called Ginevra?"

"Yes."

"I ought not perhaps to have asked you about her."

"Why not? I like to speak of those who are gone before us, and I feel nearer to her now than when she was on earth. Then we had not the same faith. Though I do not see her now, it seems to me as if we were more closely united."

"You are a Roman Catholic?"

"Yes; I was received into the Church two years after my sister's death."

"Is it as great a change as one fancies ti must be?"

"An immense change certainly, but not of the sort many people imagine."

"What do you think they imagine?"

Mrs. Sydney smiled, and said, "That, for instance, we cease to care for our

relatives; that we think it right to tell untruths and to betray confidence. I was asked by a very dear friend, a few days after my conversion, if I should think it my duty to show all her letters to my confessor."

Ita, too, could not help smiling. "It would be hard work," she said, "for confessors to read over all the letters some ladies write and receive; but what is the great change that you do feel?"

"It would be impossible to answer that question in a few words. It is like setting foot on dry ground after slipping about in a bog, or like the clearing off of a mist and getting into sunshine. It is like laying hold of something real after grasping at shadows. Yes, it is a great change."

"And has it made you happier?"

"It has given me a happiness which I believe none but Catholics know. I was very happy as a girl; very, very happy as a wife; but I had no idea of what real joy is till I became a Catholic."

"But good Protestants say they are quite happy and satisfied with their religion."

"Yes; but is it not because they do not know what it is to be in the true Church? I used to say the same thing in former days; I remember often telling my dearest Ginevra, who had always been a Catholic, that I was sure I had the same consolations and helps in my religion as she had in hers. She could not know, I said, what I felt, and so how could she tell. But when my husband became a Catholic, he who had always been a good pious Protestant, not belonging to any extreme party, but acknowledged by all to be a thoroughly good man—when he assured me that since he had made the change he had never had a doubt as to the truth of the Catholic religion, and found in it helps and consolations he had never dreamt of before, I could not but be influenced by what he said."

"And now you can judge for yourself?"

"Now I can remember and compare. Suppose a child had been born and brought up in a dark room, and had never gone out of it. He might be quite satisfied, because, not having ever known anything different, he could not possibly form an idea of the beauties

of earth, sea, and sky, or desire anything beyond what his prison could afford. . . . ."

"He might have perhaps some vague yearnings, an undefined, restless pining for light and fresh air, even if he was not exactly conscious of it. . . . ."

"Perhaps so. And have not some persons a feeling in their souls which would answer in a spiritual sense to what you describe?"

"Yes, I think they sometimes have. I wonder if the child would listen if a stranger came and talked to him of the world and its beauties."

"I should think that would partly depend on the child's character, and partly on what had been instilled into his mind since his birth. If his nurse and companions had always kept repeating that outside those four walls everything was bad, deceitful, and poisonous, and that those who would try to take him out of prison were knaves or fools, that were either deluded themselves, or were endeavouring to deceive him by speaking of green fields, fair flowers, and starry skies, he would probably stop his ears whenever they

approached him, or, if obliged to listen, would answer, 'I know better than you do what a horrid place you live in.'"

"I do think it is odd that people are not more inclined to attend to the opinion of those who have made the trial of both religions."

"I suppose you are a Protestant?"

"Yes; that is if I am anything at all. I have lived entirely abroad, and was not taught a great deal about religion whilst I was a child. Since I have been grown up, and have come to England, I find that English clergymen do not agree at all amongst themselves. One person tells me I am a Protestant; another a Catholic. One says the Bible is everything; another the Prayer-book. Some tell one to beware of Rome and Roman Catholicism, as if they were the devil; others say they want to make the Church of England as like the Roman Catholic Church as possible, and be reunited to it. Sometimes I hear that the Anglican Church is the only Catholic Church in this country, and sometimes that it is only a branch of the Universal Church. It is very puzzling. One clergyman told me

that the clergyman in the next parish to his had established an idolatrous form of worship; and, when I repeated this to Mr. Hendon, he said that that other clergyman says ours is a downright heretic. I tried to find out what the Prayer-book teaches; but that is worse than all. In one place it says one thing, and another in another. I cannot make it out at all. I began to think that the prayers—a good many of them at least—were like those in the Catholic Prayer-books, and that, perhaps, it came nearly to the same; but when I looked at the Thirty-Nine Articles it seemed quite a different religion. I said this to a Miss Conway, whom I met at Holmwood, and she tried to explain to me that everybody signed them—all the clergy at least—but that they did not understand them in their natural sense; and that it was for the sake of peace that they had been drawn up, so that people might subscribe them, and yet believe as they pleased. Do not you think it is very puzzling?"

"So puzzling, that it is really impossible to believe that such a Church can be a church at all."

"I thought at one moment I would be a real good, quiet Protestant, and think of nothing but what the Bible said. But this was worse still. I could not read it without thinking who was right and who was wrong; some texts seemed to tell one way and others another. I thought there were Catholic texts and Protestant texts; and one day I could not help fancying the Unitarians were right, and this made me very unhappy."

"What made you think so?"

"That text, 'My Father is greater than I,' and I could not find anything positive about the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity being equal. It made me wretched, for I could not bear to think as those people do—they seem hardly to be Christians."

"Did you keep all these thoughts to yourself?"

"Yes. What was the use of talking about them? I had not often opportunities of speaking of such things to people; but, if I did, they only told me it was right to believe in their way; and how was I to know that they knew better than those who said just the contrary? I have spent miserable hours by

myself reading some parts of the Bible which made me quite miserable; for instance, what St. Paul says about predestination; and then again the idea of eternity, even a happy eternity, used to give me a giddy, aching, terrible sensation which was almost unbearable. I have suffered a great deal in these ways. I do not know if other children feel as I did; but what I do know is, that if it had not been that other things distracted my thoughts, I should have been almost driven wild by all those doubts. Sometimes the thought came (and that was the worst of all), that I did not believe in anything, and then I felt so dreadfully wicked!"

"But are you troubled with those doubts now?"

"No; not since a lady, who lived near us at Mentone, lent me a little French Catholic book, in which I found that thoughts of that kind, if we detested them, were not wicked. When I was not so frightened about them, they went away; and then if I went into a Catholic church I could always pray; it seemed as if God was near me, as if I felt His presence——"

"He *was* there," Mrs. Sydney murmured in a low voice.

"How strange it is that I should speak to you in this way," Ita said, suddenly astonished at her unreserve towards a stranger. "I wonder what makes me do it."

"Perhaps it may be God's will you should; perhaps He means me to be of use to you. I never went through the trials you have done in childhood and early youth. I took everything for granted, and never questioned the truth of what I had been taught. I was pained when my sister came home at her being a Catholic, but still I troubled myself very little on the subject. It was vexatious, I thought, that she did not come to church with us, and that was all. I think the change in her husband struck me more than anything else—more than her patience through a long trial—more than her holy life and death. I have seen a great many good and pious Protestants, but I have never seen a person who had been proud, selfish, hard, worldly, become, under the influence of religion, so entirely changed as was the case with my brother-in-law after his conversion, and I

scarcely think such miracles of grace occur except in the Catholic Church."

"Is not Mr. Neville now a priest?"

"Yes, and a most devoted and hard-working one. Ever since his wife's death he has had but one object and one thought."

"To do good?"

"Yes, the highest sort of good—to make men know and love our Lord."

"Where is he now?"

"In one of the poorest districts in London, in the midst of his Irish fellow-countrymen. When I look back and think of the days when we first knew him, it seems incredible. He always says he has so much to atone for. You have heard perhaps of the strange manner in which his marriage with my sister was concealed for some time, and the reason of that secresy?"

"Yes, I heard Mr. Hendon speak of it some years ago when he came to see us at Mentone, and Mrs. Gerald the other day reminded me of it."

"He often says he is not worthy to be a priest, but he is so good and humble now. He thinks Ginevra's life was shortened by the

sufferings she went through during those terrible years, and the only thought which comforts him is that all that misery increased her holiness and merits."

"You must have found it difficult to forgive him. I think that must be the hardest thing in the world to bear, seeing those we love ill-used."

"So it is, but in this case I did not know how cruelly he had acted towards my sister, till his own grief and repentance compelled me to pity and forgive him."

Just at that moment Lady Emma began playing again, and the conversation was interrupted. Ita gave a little sigh, and turned towards the pianoforte with a look of resignation. She was charmed with Mrs. Sydney in the way young girls are apt to be with an attractive married woman, much older than themselves. She delighted in the bright smile, the pleasant voice, the kind, unaffected manner of her new friend. The history of her sister's singular marriage and early death, which had made a deep impression upon her some years before, invested Mrs. Sydney herself with a kind of romantic

interest in her eyes. She longed to go on talking to her of Mrs. Neville, but there did not occur another opportunity that evening. After the music was over some of the gentlemen came up to the sofa where they were sitting, and amongst them Lord Carsdown and Sir John Leislip, who had been playing at billiards, and discussing the looks of the young ladies who had arrived that day.

"What do you think of the heiress?" Lord Carsdown had asked his friend.

"She is rather handsome, but she does not look distinguished," Sir John replied whilst he chalked his cue.

"Well, I should say she was particularly distinguished-looking. She has a magnificent figure, and such a fine open countenance."

"But such large hands! and such a wide mouth! That other girl—I forget her name—who came with them, she is pretty enough, with her soft brown eyes and merry laugh."

"Yes, she has a nice little face."

"Is she the other's *dame de compagnie?*"

"No, she is a niece, or ward, or something of that sort, of Lady Emily Hendon's.'

"She has plenty to say for herself. I like talking to girls who are just come out, if they are quick."

"Fast, you mean?"

"No, quick, not fast—nothing is more different."

"I thought they were synonymous words."

"No, not when applied to girls."

When the game was finished, the two young men and Mr. Sydney, who had been looking on, moved to the part of the room where Ita was sitting with Mrs. Sydney.

"Miss Flower," Lord Carsdown said, "What do you think of Miss Derwent's looks? Leislip and I have been differing on that point."

"I like her face so much," Ita replied, "that I can hardly tell if I admire it; and yet I am pretty sure I do think her very handsome, and she is such a nice girl."

"Is she? Is it true that she is engaged to a cousin of hers, one Edgar Derwent, as our forefathers would have said?"

"I have never heard it from herself or Mrs. Gerald, but I know it is reported."

"For my part, I think it is very unfair," Lord Carsdown said, "to hand over a girl in that way to a cousin without even giving her the opportunity of seeing other people."

"I am sure Annie would never be handed over to anybody. She would know her own mind as well as any one in the world. If she is going to marry Mr. Derwent, it must be that she likes him."

"But if she has not seen much of other people," Sir John said, "she may meet, when she goes into society, with those she would have liked better."

Ita shook her head with an impatient little gesture which was peculiar to her, and exclaimed: "Now, really, if you did not mind my saying so, I think that idea is such a very . . . ."

"Very foolish one," Sir John said with a smile.

"Well, yes, I think so," Ita replied; "because, unless a person could see at once all the people she was ever to meet, the same thing might always happen. I suppose it is loving one person very much that prevents the pos-

sibility of liking another; do not you think so, Mrs. Sydney?"

"Yes, as long as the feeling lasts; but as it may change, the only real security consists in the principle of duty which makes a woman love only where she ought to love."

"Then you agree with me, and not with Sir John?"

"No, not quite. I should think it desirable for a girl to see something of society before she marries, not exactly for the reason he mentions, but because, without it, she can hardly judge whether the character and tastes of her future husband are likely to suit her or not."

Sir John remarked, "I have heard people say that the more dissimilar they are the better."

"I cannot believe that," Ita answered. "Of course, if people had the same faults, it would be very bad; and yet I do not know. Two misers would get on better than a generous husband and a stingy wife."

"They might quarrel less," Mr. Sydney said, laughing; "but then they might die of starvation."

"What do you think, Mrs. Sydney?" Lord Carsdown asked. "Ever since I can remember, I have heard you and Mr. Sydney quoted as the happiest couple in the world, so you ought to be good authority. Are your tastes and characters alike?"

Mrs. Sydney turned her dark blue eyes on her husband with a look of unmistakable affection, and said: "Are they, Walter?"

"No, my dear, decidedly not," he answered with an amused smile; "but as you would marry an old man like me, you knew what you had to expect."

"You mean that I like to dine out and you do not, and all that sort of thing? You would never go beyond your library and your garden if you could help it; but it is very good for you to be dragged out sometimes, and to be obliged to do what I like."

"There," Sir John cried out, "there is dissimilarity of taste working well. We are getting to the root of the matter."

"But in some respects I have already seen that you and Mr. Sydney *are* alike," Ita said.

"Indeed, what have you observed in us?"

"First, that you have both happy faces—there is one likeness; and then this: when a servant spilt some sauce on Mr. Sydney's arm and hand at dinner, he managed to hide it so quickly that nobody, and hardly the servant himself, noticed it; and after dinner, when Lady Rockcastle made a blunder and confounded together Charlemagne and Charles the Fifth, you, Mrs. Sydney, set her right so cleverly, that it only seemed as if she had said one word for another by mistake. I am sure you are both kind, and that must be a great comfort. It would be dreadful to see any one we loved giving pain to others."

"And yet it is sometimes right to give pain," Mr. Sydney said.

"Oh, very seldom, I hope."

"What dreadfully quick eyes you must have, Miss Flower," Sir John said. "If you see people's merits so quickly, you must be equally observant of their faults."

"Yes, I am; and there are two persons *in this* room I cannot endure."

"Do mention who they are, or I shall think I am one."

"Oh no, not you. One of them is that man who is speaking to Lady Emma."

"Mr. Lorton?"

"Yes. The name of the other person I will not mention, because I may perhaps change my mind."

"That's right," Mr. Sydney said. "La Rochefoucauld said we ought to live with our friends as if they were to be one day our enemies. A more Christian maxim would be to speak of every one as if he might one day be our friend."

"Nothing I am sure would ever make me like Mr. Lorton, he looks like the man who bothered Harry Hotspur 'when the fight was done.'"

"He is, in his way, as quick an observer as you are, Miss Flower."

"Then I do not only dislike, I quite hate him."

"Ah, there is an instance of similitude of character producing hatred. You and Lorton should not marry."

"Heaven forbid! Who could marry such a man?"

"Lady Emma Cars is supposed to be thinking of it."

"Lady Emma! Oh, then, what is the use of her looking so proud? I thought she was like Lady Clara Vere de Vere. I wish she would break Mr. Lorton's heart."

"I doubt his having one."

"Oh, come!" Mrs. Sydney exclaimed, "you young people are very unmerciful. Hearts often lie hidden deeper than you know of."

Sir John looked earnestly at Ita, and said, "Do you think you know when people have hearts or not?"

"I guess sometimes," she answered, a little blush and a bright smile dimpling over her sweet face.

"Oh, that horrid procession!" Sir John exclaimed, as Lady Carsdale got up and led the way to the table, where a long array of flat candlesticks stood. "What a barbarous custom it is for people all to go to bed at the same time, whether they like it or not. We were just beginning to be pleasant, and now

you must perform what a foreigner called 'the English ceremony of walking upstairs with a candle in your hand.' He brought his own down the next morning, thinking that part of the function. Good-night, Miss Flower."

CHAPTER VI.

On the following day Mrs. Gerald's headache was better; and, after breakfast, she came down to the drawing-room. Lady Carsdale greeted her with the assurance that everybody was enchanted with Annie. It might be so, but, as far as appearances went, it was Ita who seemed to be the favourite with most people. Even Lady Emma, to the annoyance of some of the party, seemed determined to monopolize her; she carried her off to her own room and, after detailing some of her plans for improving the neighbourhood, told her of several things she ought to make Mr. Hendon attend to at Marchbanks.

"But I can't make him do anything," Ita expostulated.

"That must be because you do not set about it in the right manner. Where there

is a will, there is a way. I am sure if I was staying in his house as you are, I could manage it."

"But then, you see, Lady Emma, you are yourself, and I am myself."

"But I can tell you how to set about it; if you have not tried, of course you have not succeeded. He ought to have a school under Government; the number of children is sufficient, and it is the only way of securing a really good education. And then he ought to build more cottages and not to allow lodgers. As to the Church, it is quite disgraceful to see it filled up with those horrid pews; such a scandal ought not to be allowed in these days."

"Why is it worse in these days than in any other days, Lady Emma?"

"Because people ought to know better."

"But I don't see why I should know better than Mr. Hendon and the clergyman."

Lady Emma's countenance seemed to imply, though she did not utter the words, "Not you, indeed, but *I*." However, she only said, "Because . . . . because it stands to reason that it is a great abuse for rich

people to enjoy these sort of privileges. There ought to be equality in the house of God, every reasonable person must see this; but Mr. Hendon belongs to a class of men . . . ."

What class Ita was not destined to hear, for at that moment Lord Carsdown burst into his sister's room to inquire what were her plans for the day. He was charmed to find Ita in what he called Emma's den, and she was very glad the conversation was interrupted. The task of lecturing Mr. Hendon about the state of the parish of Marchbanks, did not at all take her fancy.

"Will you drive to Grantley Manor, Em? Mrs. Sydney wants to go and see how her tribe of children get on without her, or had you rather . . . ."

"Anywhere but to Grantley Manor," Lady Emma said, in a sharp voice.

Ita's eyes had brightened. She had taken what Annie called an enthusiasm about Mrs. Sydney, and would have enjoyed nothing so much as to have driven with her to Grantley Manor.

"You can take some of the company if you like to the Roman Camp," Lord Cars-

down said, "for there are to be two sets of carriages. Which party will you belong to, Miss Flower?"

Ita was longing to say what she really wished, but was afraid it would not be civil to Lady Emma; and, whilst she hesitated, the latter pronounced the verdict, "She ought to see the Roman camp."

Ita began to think that if she lived much with Lady Emma it would make her like to do everything she ought not. But she was made to be in one respect Lady Carsdale's *beau idéal*, she never made a fuss about anything, and so remained doomed to the Roman camp. Lord Carsdown was fidgeting about the room, and looking at the weekly papers which were lying on the table. "I say, Emmy," he exclaimed, "I don't understand your High Church people. Here I find one of your favourite organs—is not that the word?—speaking of the decayed carcase of Protestantism; and another calling the Bishop of —— a good-natured old Pagan. I wonder what you would have said if poor Mrs. Syd had used such expressions."

"I do not defend the expressions, but it

is natural to feel strongly when one of our own bishops promulgates heresy."

"They had better make *you* a bishop, Emmy. It has always been your hobby to set everything to rights."

"There is a great deal that wants setting to rights."

"I dare say there is. Mrs. Harper's wig, for instance; it comes down so low on her forehead, that it makes her eyes look unnaturally sharp. By Jove, what a woman that is for talking! She is anxious to find out, Miss Flower, if you are related to a Mr. Flower she knew abroad. So you must prepare to be cross-examined about your cousins three or four times removed."

Ita coloured, and said nothing.

"Why is not Mr. Harman arrived, Em? I thought he was to come yesterday."

"So he was, but something or other prevented him happily."

"*Happily?* I think he is a very pleasant sort of man. Why don't you like him?"

"He talks, but he does not converse; I always feel that he would say just the same things if he was speaking to any one else

as he does to me, and I cannot bear that."

"I say that is all pride. Those who have the honour of speaking to you must bear it in mind all the time, I suppose."

"I like people to know whom they are speaking to."

"That they may treat you with due respect?"

"No; but I expect them to think of what I say as well as what they say, and that is what Mr. Harman never does."

"I hope I thought of what you said at dinner, Miss Flower, yesterday, as well as of what I said, as that is the right thing."

"Oh, yes, you repeated everything I said," Ita innocently answered.

"With the addition of 'By Jove,'" Lady Emma added.

Lord Carsdown reddened a little. "You are so confoundedly sharp. It is very hard on a man to have a clever elder sister. By the way, what are the essays about this month? Has Em enrolled you in her literary society, Miss Flower? There are I don't know how many young ladies who look upon

her as an oracle. They write monthly essays, and she judges of the merits of these compositions, and cuts out what she pleases. She is a great tyrant in her way, is Em. Don't knock under to her too much; she will rule you with an iron rod, if you don't take care. Come, what are the essays about this month? The likelihood of the moon being inhabited, or the character of Jack the Giant-killer?"

"You may talk as much nonsense as you please. There is more ability in what my friends write than in anything you and your friends have ever written."

"As far as I am concerned, I dare say; but I don't see why you should abuse my friends. There is Edgar Derwent, for instance; he is a fellow who would write you all down in a minute. Do you know him, Miss Flower?"

"No; but I have often heard of him at Holmwood. He is going into the Church, I believe."

"And is he going to marry Miss Derwent?"

"I do not know; people say so."

"I cannot make her out," Lady Emma said.

"There is nothing in her to make out," Ita answered. "She is what she looks—good, honest, and true."

"Mr. Lorton thinks her like one of Murillo's Madonnas—the same kind of large deep eyes and broad forehead. Well, I must go and order the carriages. You have booked Miss Flower, then, for the Roman camp?"

"Not if she would like better to go with the others. I always wish people to do what they please."

Lady Emma thought she was speaking the truth. There is a wonderful deal of unconscious lying in the world!

Ita said, "The Roman camp must be very interesting." Perhaps she should have said ought to be so, for at that moment she certainly did not feel any particular interest on the subject.

When the carriages drove up to the door after luncheon, she found that Mrs. Gerald, Annie, Mrs. Sydney, and Sir John Leislip were going in one of them to Grantley

Manor; and that she was to drive with Lady Emma, Mrs. Harper, and Mr. Lorton in the other to the Roman camp. Her heart sank a little within her at that arrangement; the other party would have been so much the pleasantest. How keen are those little disappointments which stand, as it were, midway between the miseries of childhood and the real sorrows of life. Lord Carsdown was on the box, and he could hardly help smiling when he overheard Mrs. Harper seizing the opportunity, before they were out of the park, of saying to her opposite neighbour in an insinuating voice—

"I wonder, Miss Flower, if you are related to dear old Mr. Flower, whom I knew at Naples some years ago?"

"No, I am not," Ita answered.

"Oh, I thought it likely you were, as you have lived so much abroad. It was not then at Naples that you were brought up?"

"No; I have never been there."

"But you were born in Italy?"

"No, not exactly," Ita answered, blushing very deeply; she thought Mrs. Harper one

of the most disagreeable women she had ever met with.

"I remember, some years ago, when I was travelling along the Corniche, that Lady Emily Hendon's villa was pointed out to me on a height, a little above the road, near a little chapel, before arriving at Mentone. But, somehow, I fancied she must have been at Naples also, and that you were the daughter or niece of my old friend. Flower is not a common name; I never knew any one called so except him, and now you. Is Ita your Christian name?"

"My name is Margaret."

"Ah, Margarita!" Mr. Lorton cried; "Ita is a pretty diminutive. I suppose you speak Italian fluently?"

"Yes, I know Italian."

Mrs. Harper was not satisfied. "What was the name of the villa you lived in near Mentone?"

"The Villa Sant Anna; but it was oftener called the Villa Hendon."

"I suppose your earliest recollections are of that place?"

No answer was made to this remark.

"There is nothing about which people are more different," Lady Emma said, "than in the power of recollecting their own childhood. I can call to mind all sorts of things that happened when I was in the nursery."

"Do you look back to childhood as a golden age?" Mr. Lorton asked.

"Far from it. I have always been sceptical about the happiness of children. How can the subjects of the most irresponsible power in the world be happy? I know of no more absolute tyranny than that of the schoolroom."

"Is not the despotism of a woman who knows her own power and uses it without mercy, still more tyrannical?" Mr. Lorton asked, folding his arms, and trying to look sentimental.

Lady Emma laughed, and Ita felt provoked with them both.

"Has Lady Emily given up her villa abroad?" Mrs. Harper inquired.

"No."

"Then I suppose you will return to the South next winter?"

"I suppose so."

What self-control the world teaches; how like virtue are its requirements at times. Ita could not help feeling angry at Mrs. Harper's pertinacious curiosity; but necessity compelled her to show her impatience only by the brevity of her answers and a troubled look, which none of her companions noticed. She was left to the mercy of her opposite neighbour's inquisitiveness, for Lady Emma and Mr. Lorton kept up an animated conversation between themselves. Ita could not at all understand the pleasure Lady Emma seemed to take in that gentleman's society; for though she was not very much charmed with what she had seen of her, it struck her, nevertheless, that she was too good to take an interest in the vapid talk of a person who seemed to care for nothing but the emptiest worldly gossip. She thought of the schools, the essays, the parish reforms, and wondered what points of sympathy could exist between them. There are enigmas of this kind which often puzzle us; it requires some knowledge of character to solve them. Lady Emma had a craving for admiration, joined to a pride which would not suffer her

to appear to court it. She was not handsome, and felt early that she must seek distinction more by her merits than her attractions. She took therefore a line of her own, and became a person looked up to by a certain number of friends and acquaintances, who made much of her, as the centre of a small philanthropic and literary circle. Her position, her activity, her not inconsiderable amount of talent, which, though it did not amount to genius, rose above mediocrity, enabled her to play a part amongst those who were exactly of the same way of thinking as herself. She had not the gift of winning others, or of moulding them; they must be made to her hand, and, in that case, she ruled them absolutely. What Lady Emma said, or Lady Emma wrote, formed the opinions of her own particular set of associates and readers, almost as much as the leading articles of the "Times" guide those of the English public. This acknowledgment of her power and homage to her superiority gratified, but did not quite satisfy, her restless desire for admiration. Nobody had ever fallen in love with her, and when Mr. Lorton

did, or at any rate professed to do so, the film which so often forms itself over a woman's eyes concealed from her all his imperfections and his entire want of sympathy with all she had hitherto cared about. It seemed to open to her a different view of life, it was quite a new excitement. It is said that Madame de Stael declared she would rather have been a beautiful woman than have possessed all the genius she was gifted with. If this is true, it would go far to show how little genius without religion can exalt the soul. We cannot imagine Madame Swetchine, or even Eugenie de Guérin in the humble obscurity of her decayed old *manoir*, uttering such a sentiment. Neither of these enjoyed in life the prestige of a literary reputation; they never knew the good they would do to thousands and thousands of readers, but they would never have compared for a moment the gratification of conscious beauty with the intellectual gifts which gave to their goodness so great a charm, and to their lives so deep an interest. There is but one thing greater on earth than genius—and that is holiness; united they work miracles. And

genius lies hid in strange corners, it lurks where it never has had, and perhaps never will have, opportunities of expanding. In our days it does not remain buried in obscurity as frequently as heretofore, but circumstances, idleness, or humility still conceal in many instances its existence. Is it not suppressed genius that makes some people so charming, and others so disagreeable? In the former it finds an outlet in happy ways of amusing, cheering, and helping people; or in a gaiety and originality, which gives to their conversation an indescribable fascination. It betrays itself in their talent for embellishing a home, planning a garden, and even arranging flowers. It explains the unaccountable influence they exercise; it is a fire which warms and brightens all within its reach. In the latter case it acts like a suppressed moral gout, and makes life almost unendurable. If these kind of geniuses wrote books, their families would be happier; but, in the former case, let those who rejoice in their sunshine pray that they may never set pen to paper.

Ita had perhaps a little touch of genius in

her composition, unused except for loving and social purposes. One of the characteristics of this hidden fire is enjoyment of beauty in nature and art, and quick sympathy with everything that works on the imagination. When the carriage stopped on the brow of the hill where the remains stand of what had once been a Roman camp, her heart swelled with delight at the glorious view before her, and at that thought which to some people is full of strange emotion, that the very scenery before her was gazed upon in days of yore by men with whom we have at once so little and so much in common. The day was perfectly beautiful—a true lovely English day—the sweet short grass of the Downs scented with wild thyme; the woods below the height which they had reached already displaying their bright autumnal tints; the heather and the gorse in gold and purple radiance adorning the waste patches of lands between the masses of forest trees. "I wonder if the Romans admired all this as much as we do!" she exclaimed; "did they write much about scenery in their books?"

"There, Emmy," Lord Carsdown ex-

claimed, "let that be the subject of your next essays. The comparative appreciation of . . . . of scenery shall it be, Miss Flower? or of the beauties of nature, by the Ancients and the Moderns?"

"You are coming out quite in a new line, brother," Lady Emma said; "you will soon write an essay yourself."

"Did not Virgil write some very beautiful things?" Ita asked.

"I should think he did," Lady Emma answered with rather a scornful smile.

"But what I want to know is, whether those old poets admired wild scenery. Do not they talk of rocks, and mountains, and precipices as of something horrid, and only of cornfields and orchards as something beautiful? I wonder what makes the difference between their idea of beauty and ours."

"As to precipices," Mr. Lorton exclaimed, "I rather agree with them; but for goodness' sake let us see what is to be seen, and leave the Romans alone."

What was to be seen happened to be some pieces of tessellated pavement in very good

preservation, and mounds of grass which had once been fortifications. These remains were glanced at; and "how queer!" "how pretty!" and "is that all?" were the exclamations of those of the party who had never been there before. Lady Emma and Lord Carsdown treated the Roman encampment like an old friend that was not to be too much depreciated, nor yet too much made of. It was one of the chief sights in the neighbourhood, and all their guests ought to see it.

"Wonderful people, certainly, the Romans were!" Mr. Lorton exclaimed, as they sat down again in the carriage, in the tone of a person who thinks it necessary to say something civil. The drive home was very dull to one half of the party. Mrs. Harper had no more questions to ask. Mr. Lorton endeavoured to ascertain Lady Emma's opinions on every possible subject—religious, political, and social—in order to agree with her entirely and to make some foolish remark on each in turn; and she practised that weary labour, which she was preparing to assume for life, of making that appear sensible or at

least plausible by her answers and interpretations, which in itself was vapid and foolish. Sometimes they were at cross purposes. She had once to pull him up very suddenly, when he had mistaken her strong sense of the necessity of securing for women employment in various lines for a desire they should take degrees and become doctors and lawyers; and because she did not see why they should not have votes, he jumped to the conclusion that she hoped one day to sit in Parliament. "What admirable speeches you would make, Lady Emma," he enthusiastically exclaimed. "I thought so the other day when you were addressing the Sunday-school children."

"My ambition does not extend so far," she said quickly. "Public speaking and preaching are not within a woman's province. Our duty is to influence, to urge, to stir up men to the fulfilment of their obligations."

"Exactly so. That is just how I understand it. I have always felt that if I was stirred up and urged, I could do anything."

"The evils that surround us are so rampant that, unless desperate efforts are made by every class of the community to stem the

progress of infidelity and vice, we must fall into the abyss."

"Of course we must—like that Roman who plunged into it. The encampment makes me think of him."

Lady Emma reddened. Some women would have passed over an admirer's blunder, but that was not in Lady Emma's nature: she must set him right at all costs. "It was to save his country that Curtius sprang into the abyss, and we are all hurrying on to destruction."

"Of course we are. It is a melancholy fact," Mr. Lorton sighed.

"But we may yet be saved," she resumed, "if the Church and the nation join together to resist the torrent."

"Oh, of course, the Church and the nation are everything."

"But we have to fight on one side against the inroads of Popery, and on the other against dissent and infidelity—and now unfortunately against infidelity within the Church as well as without it."

"That is the worst of it," ejaculated Mr. Lorton. "Traitors in the camp."

"And deserters also," Lady Emma added. "Men who pervert their talents in the cause of error, and abandon the Church of England out of wanton impatience and confidence in their own judgment."

"Ah, indeed, clever men are very mischievous. I never trust a clever man," exclaimed Mr. Lorton, with an energy which reminded Ita of one of Mr. Hendon's stories, the colloquy between the witty Madame de Coigny and an old French emigré.

"Ah, Madame! Ce sont les gens d'esprit qui ont perdu la France." "Et pourquoi donc, Monsieur," she exclaimed; "ne l'avez vous pas sauvée?"

On arriving at home, Ita went immediately in search of Annie, whom she had seen very little of that day. She found her just returned from her expedition, but looking very thoughtful. "Have you had a pleasant drive, Annie?" she said, sitting down by her side, and putting her arm round her waist.

"Yes; Grantley Manor is a pretty place."

"I hope you like Mrs. Sydney?"

"I don't see anything wonderful about

her. I like Mr. Sydney, but I wish they had not become Roman Catholics."

"Do not let us talk about that, Annie. We do not feel alike about it."

"No, and that is why I am vexed. I know that woman was getting round you last night. I could see it all the time you were talking to her. I saw in your face you were speaking about something that interested you, and I am sure it was that—you cannot deny it."

"No; I do not want to deny it. But, Annie, if she thinks her religion is the true one, ought she not to wish everybody to belong to it?"

"Wish is all very well, but she has no business to meddle with people."

"She did not begin talking about it. I did; but if she had, I cannot see where would be the harm."

"I do; it is wrong to unsettle people's minds."

"As to that, people's minds are so unsettled just now, they hear such different things from their own clergymen, that I cannot see that there is much danger of what you call unsettling them. Why should it

unsettle me more to hear what Mrs. Sydney and the Roman Catholics believe, than what that clergyman I went to hear in London at Wells Street believes, or, when I come down here, what your own Mr. Pratt teaches. I am sure there is much more difference between that 'High Church' preacher's doctrines and Mr. Pratt's, than between what the Puseyites say and what the Roman Catholics believe."

"We all belong to one Church, and that is all I care about. I hate controversy. People ought to be left alone and not tampered with. Mrs. Sydney was talking with Aunt Gerald of the proselytizers in Ireland, and complaining of their meddling with the poor Roman Catholics. Why should Roman Catholics meddle with Protestants?"

"In the first place, in Ireland the peasants are bribed to leave the religion they believe in, and their poverty is taken advantage of in an unfair manner. So I have heard Mr. Hendon say. In the next place, Annie, I do not think that any one has a right to urge another person to adopt his religion unless he is perfectly certain, entirely sure,

that it is the true one, and that he believes the Church he belongs to is infallible. That seems to me to make the whole difference between a Catholic and a Protestant seeking to convert others. Now you, Annie, I do not speak of myself, because I know I am quite puzzled, and really do not know what to think on the subject; but can you, for instance, say *positively* that you are convinced that Mr. Pratt's teaching is the true one, and that what Mr. Derwent believes is false?"

"I have already told you that I do not want to make up my mind about it. I hope both are right enough to be saved."

"Very well; but then how could you go and try to make Roman Catholics join a Church which teaches in one of its churches one thing, and exactly the contrary in another. You say you hope enough truth is taught in both to save a person's soul, and you think the same about Roman Catholics, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then of course you must leave them alone."

"I am sure they are wrong in all sorts of

ways, but I don't want to meddle with them. Why, then, should they meddle with us."

"Why, Annie, if you saw a person losing his way when it was most important for him to reach quickly a place of safety, would it be right and kind not to meddle with him, not to tell him at least which you were certain was the right road, though you might think that possibly by scrambling through briers and getting over dangerous fences he might perhaps arrive at the place of shelter."

"I might be mistaken as to the road."

"If you had a doubt on the subject then, I suppose you would be right not to advise him which way to go. But if you were sure . . . ."

"I'll tell you what, Ita, I will not talk to you any more about these subjects. You are cleverer than I am, you have read much more than I have, and talked with Mr. Hendon, who seems a strange kind of Protestant, who says everything in favour of Roman Catholics, though he is not one himself. When Edgar comes here, or at all events at Holmwood, you can argue with him—he will be able to answer you."

"But then it will be by an entirely different set of arguments, because you and Mr. Derwent, who thinks, I suppose like Miss Conway, differ almost as much as you and Mrs. Sydney."

"That is nonsense. People who belong to the same church cannot really differ very much."

"Oh, Annie, I must get some of the numbers of the 'Church Times' and the 'Union' out of Lady Emma's room, that you may see what they say about Protestants and Protestantism."

"I do not want to see them. Lady Emma hates Popery as much as anybody. She says Mr. and Mrs. Sydney have committed a great sin by becoming Roman Catholics; she will hardly speak to them."

"Oh, that is too absurd, too inconsistent," Ita exclaimed; "if she goes abroad, she thinks it right to go to the Roman Catholic churches, where the priests all teach that the Anglicans do not belong at all to the Catholic Church, and are living in schism and heresy. If the Holy Ghost guides the Church and teaches in it, how can it teach one thing in one place and another in another?"

"You only puzzle and tease me, Ita, by going on in this way. I will not have any more conversations of this sort with you."

"Dearest Annie, I did not begin on this subject. You started by attacking Mrs. Sydney because she talked to me about religion. I only wished to defend her. As to whether she is right or wrong, or her religion the true one or not, I really do not know. I wish with all my heart I could make up my mind, for even this little bit of the world and society which we are seeing here, makes me feel that it is necessary to have some settled ideas about religion. I am terribly inclined to care more for amusement than anything else. Do you like being here?"

"Pretty well," Annie replied; "not so much as being at home. I fancy Edgar may come to-morrow."

"Oh, really. I long so much to see him."

Annie blushed, and said, "I think you will like him. Everybody does."

"Do you think him more agreeable

and pleasing than any of the gentlemen here ?"

"Without any comparison," Annie said, quite affronted. "I should be very angry with you for asking that question if you had seen Edgar."

"Sir John Leislip is very agreeable."

Annie shrugged her shoulders.

"And Lord Carsdown and Mr. Bayham are very handsome."

"I don't see that."

"Don't you think they are good-looking ?"

"Not in comparison with my cousin Edgar."

"I hope," said Ita, laughing, "that I shall not take a dislike to Mr. Derwent, just because I have heard him so much praised. There is a perversity of that sort in human nature you know. Oh! if that is not the dressing-bell. Will you knock at my door as you go down to the drawing-room ? How is Mrs. Gerald's head to-day ?"

"Better, much; but she is not in good spirits. I cannot make out what is the matter with her."

"I am afraid I did something last

night, which must have displeased your aunt. I said I was so fond of her; I do not know why she should have been offended, and she had been so kind to me just before; but ever since her manner has become cold to me."

"Aunt Gerald is very changeable about some things, and I have observed that she is particularly so about you. I never feel sure whether you are a favourite with her or not."

"I want her so much to like me."

"Why?"

"I hardly know."

"Well, you must try and be satisfied with my liking you, which I do, though you are very tiresome about some things."

Ita laughed and ran away to dress. The ball was to take place the following evening. In the morning there came a note of excuse from Edgar Derwent to Lady Carsdale, and a letter from him to Mrs. Gerald, in which he said that he could not bring himself to leave London at that moment for the sake of any pleasure, however great, and that in any case, such a scene of gaiety as that at Cars-

dale would not harmonize with his feelings at a time when he was looking forward to the solemn act he was so soon to accomplish; but that he hoped to pay another visit to Holmwood in October; and again he alluded in a delicate manner to the hopes which he cherished, and which he was now aware she allowed him to entertain, as least as far as her own wishes were concerned. Mrs. Gerald in her answer to his last letter had spoken in a manner which warranted him fully in thus expressing himself.

Annie was disappointed at finding that she should not see Edgar till October, but on the whole was not sorry that he did not come to Carsdale. Her sense of what was right made her see the propriety of his feeling on the subject, and then, just in the state of things between them, it was not in the midst of a large party that she would have liked to meet him again.

In the course of the day arrived Lady Octavia and Miss Berwick, Mrs. Hurst and her daughters, Mr. Harman, and several young men, whose chief merit was supposed to be their love of dancing.

Mrs. Hurst was Lady Carsdale's greatest friend. It was to her she confided her few little grievances. The fuss Lord Carsdale made because one of his horses had broken its knee; the fuss Lady Emma made because those poor dear Sydneys had changed their religion; the fuss the housekeeper made because the new set of china had not arrived from London: these drawbacks to her peace of mind were dwelt on with a serenity and unconquerable cheerfulness which contrasted with Mrs. Hurst's melancholy sympathy. She did not know how to be sorry enough for the broken knee, the strange conduct of the Sydneys, or the carelessness of the tradesman who did not send the china; but she was still more sorry that dear Lord Carsdale, and dear Lady Emma, and poor Mrs. Price, took these misfortunes so much to heart, and it was so sad for dearest Lady Carsdale to be so worried in the midst of her party, and when she must have so much on her mind. One glance at her friend's beaming countenance ought to have reassured her, but Mrs. Hurst revelled in soothing imaginary sufferings. Her daughters were as healthy, as

merry, and as light-hearted girls as could be seen, but she never spoke of them but as "poor dear Fanny," and "my poor Theresa;" and the happiest events drew from her expressive sighs and pitiful ejaculations.

"Mamma," Lord Carsdown had once disrespectfully said to his mother, "you and Mrs. Hurst are 'Jean qui rit' and 'Jean qui pleure.' I like the first Jean much the best."

"Do not say anything against Mrs. Hurst, my poor dear boy. She is the greatest comfort in the world to me."

"I do not breathe a syllable against her, only I had rather be your son than hers. She has a way of sighing over me on every occasion which depresses my spirits."

Ita found it extremely agreeable to make so many new acquaintances. When the dancing began that evening, all the gentlemen seemed anxious to engage her. Before any of the neighbours arrived, she had partners enough in prospect for the whole evening. The Miss Hursts were amiable, good-humoured girls, and, though they did not say much that was worth hearing, it was

all very pleasant as far as it went. As to Miss Berwick, she changed her mind about her three times at least in the course of as many hours. The first impression was very unfavourable; she was dressed in the extreme of the fashion, and there was something bold and free in her manner which went against Ita's ideas of good taste. She could not help thinking she painted, and her hair was of a colour that hardly could be natural. Perhaps Ita would have been too inexperienced to observe this, if Lord Carsdown, who had again sat next to her at dinner, had not pointed it out. When the ladies were in the drawing-room afterwards, Miss Berwick gave a glance at the younger ones, and instantly fixed upon Ita as the one most likely to enable her to pass the next half-hour without being too much bored. They had been introduced to each other previously, and she came and sat by her. Though rather disposed to draw back from any approach to intimacy, Ita, whose foible it was to like to please, could not help being flattered at being thus singled out. It is seldom that a girl of her age is not gratified by the notice of one

older and more used to society than herself. She could not help being very much amused by Miss Berwick's talk; it could hardly be called conversation. She was droll, she was daring, she was unscrupulous in the things she said; they were not, perhaps, quite in keeping with good taste and good feeling, and yet it would have been difficult to define how, and when, and to what degree they were objectionable. Later in the evening, and when the dancing began, Ita was still an object of attention to her new acquaintance, who evidently wished it to be understood that she was the only woman of the party whom she cared to associate with.

There is always some excitement in anything like danger, and this is unfortunately the case even in a moral point of view. From what is decidedly bad those who are good shrink; but from what is questionable they do not always recoil, and even find a sort of charm in the society of those who venture to say, out of honesty they declare, what sounds startling—this sort of affectation of candour, this recklessness, a tolerably well-studied recklessness however, is one of the most

dangerous snares with which people delude themselves and others. The semblance of humility—notwithstanding Professor Porson's famous adage—and the assumption of sensibility, which was the prevalent affectation in the society of the last century, were more creditable than the cynical truthfulness which some people now display. It is better to pretend to be amiable than to be brutal. But the very novelty of this sort of freedom of manner and style of language to a girl educated in different habits of mind, excites a sort of interest such as is felt on a first acquaintance with a foreign country. People who say without reserve anything that comes into their heads, must be rather amusing if they are not very tiresome. Ita was rather amused by Miss Berwick's funny ways, as she called them. She found her a more amusing companion than Lady Emma, and consequently lost ground very rapidly in the latter's good opinion, who took an opportunity of saying to Annie, that she was sorry to see Miss Flower had taken a fancy to that very objectionable girl. She should not have thought that she was the sort of person to be

captivated by anybody so *mauvais genre*, but that she began to see what was her character.

"One evening she was engrossed by Mrs. Sydney's exciting talk about religion, and making her believe she was ready to become a Roman Catholic; and the next as amused as possible with the slang and give-and-take style of that Miss Berwick's conversation. Depend upon it," she added, "she is a person who will always go into extremes, and I feel convinced now, that in a year's time your little friend will be either a Papist or as fast as Miss Berwick herself."

"L'un n'empêche pas l'autre," ejaculated Mrs. Harper, who was following them; "for the Berwicks are Catholics."

"Really? Mamma never told me so!" Lady Emma exclaimed, half displeased at not having been previously informed of the fact, but glad that the fast young lady should turn out to be a Papist. She felt, and perhaps justly, that Miss Berwick's dress and manners might do away with much of the favourable impression Mrs. Sydney might have created in favour of her creed. For the first time since the latter's conversion Lady Emma

volunteered to go and sit by the latter, with no other purpose apparently than to put a question relative to her coreligionist, which implied surprise at her worldly ideas and questionable manners. Mrs. Sydney felt inwardly pained, but said quietly, "Dear Lady Emma, I am quite as sorry as you could wish about it, but I have one consolation: I feel more hope that the paint and the false hair, which shock you so much, may be one day discarded, and the whole tone of that poor girl's mind changed, than you perhaps would have, if you saw a Protestant give way to those follies. There is a power of recovery in our religion, which does not, I think, exist in yours. Protestants often keep on a height; but if they fall seldom regain their footing."

"I assure you, Mrs. Sydney, you are mistaken. Numbers of girls who once led worldly, or sometimes worse than worldly lives, enter our sisterhoods."

"Perhaps so. But it is not the Protestant religion which forms sisterhoods; you imitate us—you borrow from us without, indeed, paying interest or giving security, and time will show whether the profits are

real and lasting. But whatever the results may be, you must own that the religious life is not the offspring of Protestantism."

"Certainly not. We dislike Protestantism quite as much as you do."

With something made up of a smile and a sigh, Mrs. Sydney heard that assertion.

"This is not the moment to discuss that point," she said; "but I should very much like to talk it over quietly with you some other time."

"Oh, I always avoid controversy!" Lady Emma replied, and, crossing the room, joined Lady Rockcastle, and said in an aggrieved voice, "The worst of Roman Catholics is that they always want to get one into an argument and throw things in one's teeth!"

Meanwhile the dancing was actively going on. Ita, even in the midst of her enjoyment of what was quite a new pleasure, rather longed to be sitting by Mrs. Sydney. Amused as she was with Miss Berwick, and pleased at the consciousness of being a general favourite, and more asked to dance than any one else, she felt there was as much difference between the sort of liking she had for her new

acquaintance, and that she felt for Mrs. Sydney, as between the admiration one might have for a comic song or an exquisite poem. She resolved to try and see more of the latter the next day; she wanted to get her to tell her all the history of her sister, and she did hope before they parted that she would ask her to Grantley Manor.

Annie had been making friends with the Miss Hursts, and Mr. Harman had devoted himself to Mrs. Gerald. He had travelled a great deal, and most people thought him agreeable; but he did possess the peculiarity Lady Emma had mentioned, he was too full of his own thoughts to attend much to those of others. Perhaps there was a likeness between him and Mrs. Gerald in this respect—only the difference was, that he poured out his thoughts, and that she kept hers to herself. He spoke of the East, and of Egypt, and of languages, and of tribes, while she watched every look and motion of the two young girls under her care. Once Ita came and stood quite close to her. She was flushed with exercise and excitement, her hair falling down on her shoulders, and her lovely face looking really beautiful. Mr.

Harman had not taken notice of her before, he then asked who she was. When Mrs. Gerald had answered his question, he exclaimed, "You don't say so! Then that is the very little girl I saw at Lady Emily's some sixteen years ago. She had just adopted her—a formal proceeding abroad, which both parties are obliged to abide by. To be sure, what a pretty creature she is! Miss Flower, you say, she is called. I remember there was a great debate as to the name they would give her. 'Fior del Mare' was proposed, and then Margarita-Pearl of the Sea. She was a wonderfully engaging child. Lady Emily, after her husband's death, sank into a sort of melancholy which nothing could rouse her from. Mr. Hendon bethought himself of borrowing this little girl to amuse her, and she took such a fancy to the young lady that it ended by her adopting her. We were great friends at that time—Margarita and I. We must renew acquaintance. Ita she used to call herself."

"Who was she?"

"She came from a village between San Remo and Mentone. Very poor people, I believe, had brought her up. Some difficulty

was made about her religion, I remember. They said she was to be a *buona Christiana.* Lady Emily said, 'Yes, of course she would be educated a good Christian,' and there the matter ended. Will you introduce me to Miss Flower?"

"Ita!" Mrs. Gerald said, in a low voice. Immediately the young girl turned round with a pleased, eager look, as if the very sound of Mrs. Gerald's voice gave her pleasure. "Here is a gentleman who knew you years ago, and wishes to be introduced to you."

Ita looked at Mr. Harman with her ingenuous bright expression. She did not, of course, recollect him at first; but suddenly it flashed upon her that he was the kind, good-natured man who used to play with her in those early days at Mentone when she first lived with Lady Emily. She was delighted at this reminiscence, and felt quite sorry to be hurried away by her partner.

As he sat down again he said, "She is charming, that little lady, but not at all like an Italian. What a pretty way she has of speaking, with just the slightest possible foreign accent."

"Did you ever see her before she came to Lady Emily?"

"No; I did not."

"Used she ever to go and see her family?"

"I think not. It was made, I believe, one of the conditions of the adoption."

"There is something very unnatural in that arbitrary severance of natural ties."

"I remember hearing something about her being a child picked up at sea. Somebody, speaking of her, said she had been picked up in the street by Lady Emily, and the answer was 'No, not in the street.' I think the story was that she had been found, like a little Moses, floating in her cradle, by some fishermen, who had taken her home. I wonder if she knows herself anything about it."

Mrs. Gerald made no answer; but when Mr. Harman, an instant afterwards, began speaking to her about the sources of the Nile, she could not even pretend to attend to him. Her abstraction was so great, that it forced itself even on his notice, and he was obliged, as soon as possible, to look out for another listener.

Ita had seen a great deal of Mrs. Sydney on the last day of their visit; they had walked round the grounds together, and had some further conversation about religion. She had been invited, as she wished, to Grantley Manor, but was afraid that Lady Emily would not be able to spare her again for a long time. She heard all the story of Mrs. Neville's sufferings, her secret marriage, her fidelity to her faith under the most trying circumstances, her reconciliation with her husband, and her death which soon followed. It was a romantic story, and one calculated to make an impression on the mind of an enthusiastic young girl. All her predilection at that time for the Catholic religion was founded on romance—on the beauty of its worship, and the picturesque associations connected with it. She longed to see the chapel of Grantley Manor, because it would remind her of her favourite churches abroad, and because there is something poetical in the historical traditions of English Catholicism. She had, at the same time, met with a person, whose character, looks, and manners had singularly attracted her, and, for the first days after her

return to Marchbanks, she thought much more of Mrs. Sydney than of any other person she had made acquaintance with that week; even than of Sir John Leislip, whom she had liked very much, and who had seemed to like her in a way which might have made a deeper impression upon her, if there had been more time on both sides for better acquaintance. Her return to Marchbanks was gloomy enough. It seemed very flat and uninteresting to spend the evenings alone with Lady Emily and Mr. Hendon: for, though the latter was a clever man, he did not think it worth while to make himself agreeable in domestic life; and Lady Emily's feeble health, and want of interest in everything a young person would naturally care for, was painfully distressing to her adopted child. In a different and inferior sense, Ita experienced the feeling thus described by St. Theresa, "I seemed as one who had a great treasure, and who was desirous that all should share in it, and yet my hands seemed tied as if to prevent me from distributing it." Thoughts came to her which she longed to impart to others; there was in her heart a deep power of loving,

which as yet had found no object; a superabundance of activity, mental and bodily, perpetually seeking for exercise. She seemed, morally speaking, to wander through desert places and to find no rest.

To Annie, on the contrary, it was an unmitigated delight to be at home again, and the weeks which intervened between her return from Carsdale, and Edgar's visit in October, were full of sweetness. She had had a glimpse of the world, and had convinced herself how little she cared for it. She had seen other young men, and had been able to judge of what she had never doubted, and that was, that Edgar was superior even to those who were generally acknowledged to be pleasing and agreeable. His letters to Mrs. Gerald, parts of which her aunt read aloud to her, showed more and more with what true religious feelings he was entering on his new career, and though there was much in his enthusiasm and his devotion she could not entirely sympathize with, her admiration for his goodness daily increased. Her mind dwelt continually on the thought that he was soon coming—coming, she hoped, to propose to her—and that she had it in her

power to make him happy—happy in every way; to make her home his home; to give him the means of carrying out his dearest wishes; to please him; to see him smile, that smile which since her earliest childhood she had never seen on his face without delight. Annie really loved nobody in the world very much but him, and it was a quiet, great deep happiness that they would spend their lives together in that place which she was about to make him master of. It was well that she had so many pleasant thoughts to dwell upon, and that she enjoyed solitary rambles and evenings by herself in the drawing-room, for Mrs. Gerald was very much out of spirits, and, which she had never known her before, strangely irritable. She stayed for hours together locked up in her room, and Annie found it hard to please her, especially with regard to anything that had to do with Marchbanks. If she proposed to go there, or to ask Ita to come to them, Mrs. Gerald generally looked annoyed, and said, "She really could not see any reason for this violent intimacy." If, on the contrary, Annie said nothing about it, she sometimes hinted at her

being changeable, and neglecting those she at moments made such a fuss with. When Ita came, her manner to her was more than ever uncertain. Annie thought this rather provoking; but she was too happy to care much about it. They had, however, one scene which, for a moment, disturbed and annoyed her very much, especially as it led to her uttering a hasty expression which she deeply regretted, and which offended her aunt more than anything she had ever said or done in her life.

Mrs. Gerald had gone to pay a visit at some distance, and Ita came unexpectedly to spend the afternoon with Annie. They had talked for some time, drank tea in the conservatory, and then Ita happened to say she had never seen the whole of the house.

"Oh, I will take you all over it," Annie exclaimed. "Come upstairs, I will show you my bed-room and dressing-room, and the visitors' rooms, and Aunt Gerald's rooms too, for she is out."

And so she did; they wandered through the house to their hearts' content, and looked into every nook and corner. As they passed

through Mrs. Gerald's room, Annie said, "I must show you my mother's picture."

She drew the curtain aside, and Ita exclaimed, "Oh, what a charming face! and is that you, Annie, when you were a baby?"

"Yes," Annie answered, and then she suddenly exclaimed, "Now I see who you are like! It has always bothered me. You are so like that picture of my mother."

"Am I? Well, I can fancy it from what I have seen of my own face in the glass."

"Let me put a scarf round your head to look like that turban, and arrange your hair in the same way, and then you shall look in the glass and see if the likeness is not striking."

She ran into her room and brought back a blue scarf of the same colour as the turban, which she twisted and arranged on Ita's head, and put on her shoulders a black lace shawl similar to the one in the picture. Then she led her before the pier-glass, and said: "Don't you look exactly like it?"

Just at that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Gerald came into the room. The first thing she saw was Ita's form and face in the

glass opposite to her. She gave a scream, and, when the two girls turned round and moved towards her, she was looking deadly pale.

"We have startled you," Annie exclaimed. "I am so sorry. I thought you were out, and I was showing Ita the house."

She kept, as she spoke, undoing the turban, and pulling off the scarf from Ita's shoulders. Mrs. Gerald glanced round the room and saw the curtain drawn aside. Her lips quivered, and laying her hand on Annie's shoulder with a pressure that was almost painful, said with violence: "I cannot forgive you for daring to bring that girl into my room."

Annie was passionate—not easily roused, but capable of being roused to anger, especially by anything like injustice. She saw the burning flush on Ita's cheeks, and her eyes filling with tears, and she said in a tone of indignation, "This is rather hard in my own house!"

Mrs. Gerald fixed her eyes upon her with a strange expression, a wistful, troubled look,

in which there was a mixture of tenderness and resentment. As the two girls were leaving the room, she called back Ita, and said in a trembling voice, "It was not your fault—forgive me."

The young girl threw her arms round her neck. Mrs. Gerald seemed as if she was trying to endure the caress for a second, and then shook her off almost roughly. When she was gone, and Mrs. Gerald and Annie met again before dinner, both were very much embarrassed. They had never had anything of a quarrel before, and did not exactly know how to behave to each other. As usual, the one whose affection was the strongest, and who also felt perhaps that she had been the most in the wrong, made the first advance, and said: "Annie, if I did not love you so much . . . ." there she paused.

"Oh, Aunt Gerald, I ought not to have said those odious words about this being my own house."

"It would have been better not," Mrs. Gerald answered. "You do not know how thoughtless words may wound. I wish you never to take anybody into my room. When

you are married I shall leave you, and then you may do as you like. I shall carry away with me the memorials of those who live only in my recollection, and whose likenesses I cannot bear to see you trifle with. God only knows what I have suffered to-day!"

All this seemed strange and exaggerated to Annie. She could ill brook reproaches from one who had so unceasingly worshipped her; and longed more than ever for Edgar's arrival since Mrs. Gerald had ventured to be displeased with her. It would be very trying she thought if her aunt took to being cross, and really she did not know how to act about Ita. She almost wished that November was come, and that she had left Marchbanks. It was so awkward, and those caprices about her so tiresome.

Edgar arrived, and about a week afterwards, just as Annie had wished and planned it, they stood together on a blue and gold evening in October on the terrace—the red and yellow leaves falling to the ground in gentle showers—the robin red-breasts twittering about them, the last roses of summer blossoming on the walls of the old house, the

sound of the running water making music in their ears—he told her he loved her, and asked her to marry him. She gave him her hand, and said with a glistening eye and a faltering voice: "It is what I have always wanted. I have always wished your happiness more than anything else in the world."

"And you care for me, Annie? You will be happy with me?"

"Oh, yes; only too happy," she answered; and they returned to the house engaged to each other.

Mrs. Gerald was very much affected when she heard it was all settled, and of course very glad. But it was a restless sort of happiness. A heavy sense of responsibility seemed to weigh upon her, and she was nervous and almost ill when the arrangements about the marriage came to be discussed. It was agreed that the wedding should not take place till the spring. There were circumstances connected with the property which made it difficult for the settlements to be drawn up in a hurry, and one of the principal trustees had gone abroad for some months. In the meantime Edgar accepted Lord Cars-

dale's prospective offer of the small living of Bramblemoor, which had hitherto been held in conjunction with his own larger one by the Rector of Carsdale. This gentleman had readily consented to give up this small appendage to his parish in consideration of an arrangement better suited to his convenience, which Lord Carsdale was able to make. He also obligingly appointed Edgar as his curate until such time as he should be in priest's orders, and could take possession of the living.

The church stood in the centre of a straggling hamlet, the cottages of which were scattered over a wide common, inhabited by a wild set of people, almost all Dissenters, whom Edgar told Annie it would take care and labour to bring over to the Church. He intended to reside there till after their marriage, and even then, though Holmwood would of course be their home, he should still devote much of his time to Bramblemoor.

Annie did not object to anything—she was quite contented, quite happy; and she thought, though she said nothing about it,

that it would be much better he should pursue all his own plans at Bramblemoor than interfere with Mr. Pratt, whom, above all things, she wished to be left undisturbed during the remainder of his life. She could not judge of doctrines, and, as to practices, what suited one person might not suit another; and she did not, for her part, mind if she said her prayers in a church with flowers and candlesticks on the altar, or in one with a table, with two chairs on each side of it. It was nothing to her if clergymen liked to put on vestments, or to wear a plain black gown. She wished everybody to be good, and, as Mr. Pratt and Edgar were her two ideals of goodness and thought as differently as possible about religion, she could not believe it signified much—the old point she had so often discussed with Eliza Conway—what people did believe. Only on one subject Annie was prejudiced, she could not endure Roman Catholicism. There was a mixture of feelings in this antipathy. First, the strong English idea that the Church of England, the Establishment, whatever it might teach or not teach, do or not do, was

the English form of religion which all English people should adhere to. Then, one of Edgar's ideas was that an English clergyman was a priest, and the Roman Catholic Church forbade priests to marry. This fact made his marriage a sort of reflection upon him on the part of that Church, which, with feminine susceptibility, she resented. Her love for Edgar was a peculiar and very deep feeling—that kind of affection which undemonstrative people sometimes have for the one person they really care for—an intense engrossing devotion capable of every sacrifice, but seldom expressed by word or by look, except when any strong emotion calls forth a vehement outburst of the hidden fire. One of its effects in Annie's case was her growing hatred of the Church of Rome. It had always been the object of Mr. Pratt's aversion, and it was, though in a different way, dreaded and disliked by Edgar. These two reasons arrayed her strongest feelings against it.

Meanwhile, Ita was spending a melancholy autumn at Marchbanks. Lady Emily's strength had so rapidly diminished after a cold she had caught in October, that it was

thought impossible for her to travel. When she got a little better, the season was too far advanced to make a journey safe, and the doctors recommended that she should spend the winter in two rooms kept at an even temperature. This arrangement suited Mr. Hendon. He was glad to have his sister-in-law in his house: neither she nor Ita interfered with his comfort, or took up his time. Ita was the only one to whom this change of plans proved to be a great disappointment. She longed for the south, for sunny Mentone, its blue bays, its lovely valleys, and its orange and olive woods, with a strong yearning; she pined for the churches, and chapels, and crosses, and all the outward symbols of religion, which she had been accustomed to all her life, and which she loved with an ignorant, unreasoning fondness. For she knew nothing of the truths symbolized by these objects; she did not understand why she felt a peculiar feeling of awe and consolation when she knelt in a Catholic church, or why certain words and certain blessings seemed to have a mysterious effect upon her. She had no conscious faith in the Real Presence, and yet

at the elevation during mass and when benediction was given, it had always seemed to her as if a heavenly dew refreshed her soul. And she yearned to feel all this again. She longed for the beauty of earth, sea, and sky; for her morning walks, in the early dawn, to the Annunziata, the beautiful little sanctuary of the hills, in the midst of a smiling desert. For Lagheto, the monastery where thousands and thousands of peasants flock every year from every point of the Riviera, to ask for favours or to bring their simple *ex votos*. She longed to hear again the litanies and hymns of the poor women in the cathedral of San Michele—untutored strains which have proceeded from the hearts and lips of generation after generation of simple pious souls, whose lives were as pure as their own skies, till the inroads of a civilization, falsely called progress, made its way among them with its accursed train of luxury and vice. Yes, Ita longed to get away from the clouds, the cold, the dulness of an English winter. Everything in and about Marchbanks appeared to her at that moment uninteresting and unprofitable. She

had nothing to do, no cares and no occupations. Mrs. Gerald's capricious conduct spoilt the pleasure of her visits to Holmwood, nor was Annie, though she liked her very much, quite a congenial companion. She did not see the least prospect of going to Grantley Manor; Lady Emily required just enough of her attention to prevent her being able to leave home, and yet took up very little of her time, which consequently often hung heavy on her hands. For even reading does not suffice to fill up the hours of a long day, or to satisfy the impetuous cravings of an ardent spirit. And as to religion, what was there in Protestantism to compare with the beauty of the glimpses she had had from without of the inward loveliness of the Catholic Church abroad, the crumbs which she had gathered here and there from its rich stores of love, faith, and hope? The one Sunday service, in the dreariest little ugly parish church imaginable—the prayers read in a pompous tone, and responded to by a clerk with a nasal twang—psalm-singing of the most depressing and monotonous sort—a dull sermon read by a dull preacher!

She felt saddened and depressed beyond description by this pure Protestant form of worship, and her only comfort was the idea that began to dawn in her mind that one day—when, how soon, where, how, she knew not—she must be a Catholic. It was an idea that enabled her to endure the present, it was something to hold on to. She clung to this thought like a person in a dangerous position grasps a rope which, if the case becomes more desperate, may afford a hope of safety. Many hold this spiritual rope in their hand for years, so long that their grasp of it grows feeble, and at last the hand becomes paralyzed, and loses its power over it. Then the crisis comes—one of those turning-points when there can be no standing still, when an advance must be made or a retrograde step taken. God help, in that hour, those who have let go the resolution they had made, who have allowed the rope to slacken till it has escaped from their hold! It will be a signal mercy if, in the decisive hour, they do not sever themselves for ever from the haven they had once hoped to make.

Edgar was obliged to absent himself from

Holmwood almost the whole of November, but early in December he was to take possession of the cottage he meant to make his home at Bramblemoor. Annie had quite neglected Ita during the days he had been at Holmwood after their marriage was settled, but after his departure, they met oftener again, and she told her of her engagement. The tidings had already reached Marchbanks, and also the news that Edgar was to be curate at Bramblemoor, and eventually have the living. Ita knew the place very well. The little village, the picturesque common, the clusters of cottages belonging to the parish, but widely separated from one another, had often attracted her notice. The inhabitants of these sheds, or cabins, for they were hardly anything better, had originally been squatters on the common, and had gradually taken possession of these tenements, which Lord Carsdale permitted them to occupy at a merely nominal rent. Some of them were of gipsy extraction, others had once been poachers, many of them were only the poorest of the poor,—neglected, wild, uncared-for beings, who led the nearest approach

to a savage life possible in a civilized, old world country. It was strange how long and how entirely they had been unnoticed. A small Independent Methodist chapel existed on one side of the common, the furthest from the village of Bramblemoor; some of the squatters frequented it, others did not go to any place of worship. There was a small church in the village, but no resident clergyman; the service had only been occasionally performed by the Rector of Marchbanks. But Lady Emma Cars had entreated her father to repair the church, and had superintended these reparations herself. She gave herself up with ardour to this employment, going over there several times a week, to watch and direct the progress of the work. The plans had been drawn up in strict accordance with proper ecclesiastical architecture; beautiful glass windows designed—the altar, with a cross upon it, placed duly in the eastern direction, an elaborately carved font, given by Lady Emma herself, near the entrance, and every detail carefully studied, so as to exhibit as near an approach as possible to the appearance of a Catholic church, and yet not to

infringe the letter of the law or the direct prohibitions of the bishop of the diocese: for some years ago these dignitaries of the Church of England were not quite so openly defied, disobeyed, and scouted by the self-termed Catholic portion of their flocks, as is now the case.

This church was really a very pretty one; and, when it was nearly completed, Lady Emma's next object was to get her father to induce the Rector of Marchbanks to give up this small living, and to bestow it upon a churchman of the highest and, she added, the soundest Church principles. Lord Carsdale, who was himself rather broad church than anything else—at least in so much that he carried the good-nature which belonged to his character into religious questions, and would have gladly included in the pale of the Establishment Mohammedans and Pagans, if they had desired—was quite willing to agree to what his daughter wished. She urged that those scattered wild people on the common ought to be Christianized, and that a resident clergyman alone could undertake that work, and that, as it was most important

the services should be attractive, it was necessary to appoint one who would promote chanting, and carry out church principles.

"Very well, Em, look out for one," her father dutifully replied, in a tone befitting an age when children often think it their business to be spiritual directors to their parents. And so Lady Emma turned the subject over in her mind with no little anxiety, and corresponded about it with Eliza Conway, who immediately suggested Mr. Derwent. She thought nothing could be better than his beginning at Bramblemoor what he would carry on at Holmwood whenever Mr. Pratt departed this life. Lady Emma objected that when Mr. Derwent was married to his cousin he would not reside at Bramblemoor, and to have a resident clergyman was the chief object in view. Miss Conway replied that he was not going to be married for some months, that he would subsequently, no doubt, appoint a curate, who would, when he left, act under his directions and in his spirit—that the poverty of the people among whom the work had to be carried on made it desirable that their clergyman should have some means of

assisting them; all sorts of charities would have to be founded, and if once Edgar Derwent took charge of the parish, he and Annie would always take an interest in it. These arguments were rather cogent. Lady Emma hesitated, however, a little about appointing or making her papa appoint, which came to the same thing, a married, or to be married, clergyman. There were floating ideas in her mind as to the higher perfection of the single state; but then there was this important consideration, unmarried High Church clergymen were more easily susceptible of being perverted to Rome. A wife was a great safeguard, though unfortunately not an absolute preservative, from Popery. This consideration decided her, the living was offered to and accepted by Edgar.

Such an opening for active, zealous work was most acceptable to him at that moment. He was preparing to take upon himself sacred duties—to devote himself to what he thought the highest calling. He was also preparing to enter a state of life which some persons, even in his own communion, deemed not perfectly in accordance with that high calling,

and he wished to prove to himself, far more than to others, that there was nothing in those bright prospects of human happiness and prosperity which militated against his intention of devoting himself most ardently to apostolic labour. He rejoiced in the thought of taking up his abode, for a while at least, in this poor little village among those ignorant people, and of leading Annie to share with him all the interests and the occupations which were to be for ever interwoven with their married life. Those months would be a sort of preparation for future usefulness. Visions of future self-renouncement, of wealth devoted to the spiritual and temporal welfare of others, of a holy simplicity which would be all the more meritorious because it would be voluntary, floated in his mind and deepened his enthusiasm.

Whether Annie perfectly understood, or perfectly shared, these aspirations might seem a little doubtful. She did so certainly so far as this, that she would never object to anything he wished or which would make him happy; the pleased look with which she listened to his plans, and the delight she took

in his enjoyment of these schemes, made him imagine that she was as eager about them as himself. To Ita she used to say exactly the truth: "If Edgar were to like me to go and live at Bramblemoor, in that ugly little cottage he has taken, I would. But I hope he never will wish it."

CHAPTER VII.

It was a few days before Christmas, the season was a particularly mild one. There were roses in the gardens, and actually primroses in the woods. The air had a strange softness; the pale northern sun was shining through the painted glass windows, on the tesselated pavement of the little church of Bramblemoor, and shedding its faint light on the green graves of the churchyard, on the vast expanse of the neighbouring common, and the clumps of fir-trees and holly bushes which dotted its surface.

Edgar Derwent had lately taken possession of his small house. It was scarcely better than a labourer's cottage; the furniture was poor; one old woman he had engaged as cook and housekeeper, and a young savage under her orders was being

trained into an errand boy, or rather a boy-of-all-work. There was scarcely a mark of distinction about the place except a tolerably large number of books, almost more than the place would hold, on the shelves of the sitting-room and his own bed-room, and several beautiful religious engravings and prints, which hung on the walls. He was standing before a table covered with flowers, which had been brought in by the children he had already gathered together under the care of a dame competent to teach them the alphabet, and not to fight, at least within the walls of the awful edifice, dignified by the name of school, a sort of outhouse of his own abode. It was a Saturday, and he wanted to have a cross of flowers and wreaths prepared for the decoration of his church the next day, St. Thomas's Feast. He was hesitating whether to ask his cook or his schoolmistress to undertake the task, when Annie drove up to the door in her pony-chaise, and Ita with her. He came to the door with a bright smile on his pale, thin, but very handsome face, and exclaimed: "Why, Annie, you are come just in time to help me." Then, as she said, "Miss

Flower, Edgar," he bowed to the other young lady, and helped them both out of the carriage. When they came into his little sitting-room, Annie, exclaimed, "What a number of flowers! What *are* you going to do with them?"

"I want wreaths for the church. I want it to look very pretty to-morrow. I have gone round to a great many of the cabins on the common, and made people promise to come to church, who have not been into one for years."

"Do you think they will care about flowers?" Annie asked.

"Oh, I am sure they will," Ita exclaimed.

Edgar smiled: "I suppose then that you are fond of them yourself: I mean, that you like to see them in a church."

"Oh, yes. I was glad to hear that even in Marchbanks Church there will be holly at Christmas. I do so long to see something there besides the pews, the reading-desk, and the green baize on the communion table."

"It is as ugly a church as can be seen," Annie said; "but I wonder if we could help Edgar about these wreaths?"

"The worst of it is that I wanted to go

to the other side of the common this afternoon to look up some more people, and I thought you would like to walk with me. You could have your pony put up in the farm stable for a couple of hours."

"I should like it very much, but then your wreaths?"

"Annie," Ita said, in a low voice, "could not I make the wreaths while you walk with Mr. Derwent? I should like it so much. I made very pretty ones at Mentone."

"I know you arrange them beautifully. May she stay here, Edgar, and I will go with you?"

"It is very kind of you, Miss Flower," Edgar said; "but are you sure it will not bore you?"

"Not in the least. I shall like it so much. And if I have not enough, may I get some more flowers out of your garden. I see a few left."

"Yes," he said, laughingly. "Take them all if you like. We cannot expect they will last long now; and on Christmas Day we shall fall back on our traditional holly."

The pony-chaise was put up, and Annie

and Edgar went off to the common, looking very happy. Ita began her work. She drew the table nearer to the window that she might see the moor, and one particular holly-bush which she had taken a fancy to from the moment she had looked out of that window. The sky was particularly pretty, too, that afternoon. She had not felt, since she had been in England, so pleased with any scenery, not even the beauties of Holmwood or Carsdale, as with that bit of wild landscape, or set about anything with so much pleasure as making these wreaths. She finished them in about an hour and a-half, and then strolled into the village, and on to the little church, the door of which was open. She was surprised at the beauty of the inside. The painted glass was exceedingly pretty, and the tesselated pavement also. The communion table really looked like an altar; there was a picture of the Crucifixion above it, and the whole aspect and arrangement of the building was altogether different from the cold bare churches she had hitherto seen in English villages. She sat down on one of the front benches, and took up a book which was lying

there. It was a manual of prayers and devotions, extracted from Catholic authors, and adapted to the use of the English Church. A smaller volume contained a preparation for Confession and Communion, modelled on those she had seen abroad. She was absorbed in examining these books when a slight touch on the shoulder startled her. Annie whispered, "We must be going home." She followed her to the door, and there they met Edgar, who had seen the wreaths and was delighted with them. He expressed his gratitude and pleasure very warmly. She told him she had been looking at some of his books, and he offered to lend them to her. Annie had been talking to him, during their walk, of Ita's Catholic tendencies, and her conversations with Mrs. Sydney. He had eagerly promised to use his best efforts to keep her in the Anglican Church, and felt convinced he should succeed. The minute he had seen her he perceived that she was no ordinary person; that she was worth taking pains with.

"We must not lose her," he said to Annie.

She smiled and said, "It will be a struggle between you and Mrs. Sydney."

"No, dear Annie," he answered. "No—it will be a struggle between the power of fascination in the Roman Church, so dangerous to warm hearts and imaginative minds, and the holy, quiet influences of our own Church, which, if religiously accepted, gently mould the character and discipline the soul. From what you tell me of your friend, Protestantism could never gain or retain any hold on her mind; but when she understands that our Church is thoroughly Catholic, though not Roman, I hope it will be quite a new light to her."

Though Annie had said they were to go home, none of the party were in a hurry to separate. The two girls sat down on the stile at one end of the little churchyard listening to Edgar's plans and hopes. It was a new thing to Ita to hear any one speak as Edgar did—he was so earnest, so deeply earnest. As he dwelt on what he had already been able to do amongst the poor people, and of the feelings with which he was striving and praying for their conversion, her

heart burnt within her. She longed to help him in more important ways than by making wreaths; and, for the first time, there rose in her mind thoughts of what life might be with a great aim and a great work. She admired him very much. In the prime of youth, and engaged to be married to one who evidently idolized him, as Annie did—his whole heart and soul seemed engrossed by the intense desire of winning to God some of those poor, sinful, ignorant souls. When they passed the little makeshift for a school, some twenty children came running out and clustered round Edgar, clinging to his coat or catching hold of his hands and knees. He shook them off good-naturedly, and showed his visitors the narrow low room which served for the present as a school. Some pretty Scripture prints hung round it, and there was a large mattress in one corner for babies to sleep upon when tired of learning the alphabet.

"I have a night school here," Edgar said, "and I read aloud amusing books to the young men. I have got seven or eight to come regularly, and I hope to make them into valuable assistants in time. I want to

be like that bishop who found seventeen Catholics in his diocese, when he first came to it, and all the rest were heretics; but before he died, all his people were Catholics, save seventeen who remained heretics."

"You want to make these people Catholics?" Ita timidly asked.

"Yes—good, thorough English Catholics. I mean to make them love their Church—delight in her services, and value her sacraments. I have got two or three of the best disposed persons amongst them to come to daily prayers; it is but a small beginning, but I hope in time that, at break of day and at sunset, the whole of my little flock will offer up together the sacrifice of praise and prayer. I have been reading an account of what the Curé of Ars, a small place in France, accomplished in his parish. I mean to make him my model."

Ita coloured deeply. "Do you mean that you take a Catholic priest for your model?"

"Yes, as far as his virtues and his holiness go. I only wish I might hope to emulate them ever so distantly, but I am grateful that my own Church is a purer one

than his. It is in her, by her, for her, and through her that I have to work; I thank God for it, and take for my motto that beautiful sentence—the watchword of the Catholic party in England: 'In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength.'"

"Yes, those are beautiful words!" Ita ejaculated, looking very thoughtful.

"They ought to be the motto of those who labour to convince others of the truth."

"I like your church, I mean that little church there, very much. I should like to come and pray there every day."

"Well, at eight in the morning and seven at night we have prayers, and in the evening I give a short instruction. Annie and Mrs. Gerald are coming on Christmas Eve, perhaps you will also?"

"Oh yes!" Annie exclaimed. "You must come and hear Edgar preach. I should have liked so much to come here to-morrow, but I cannot take the carriage out on Sunday."

"Could not you walk?" Ita quickly asked.

"Oh dear no; Aunt Gerald would not hear of it. We must really be going now, she will wonder what has become of us."

They got into the pony-chaise, and Edgar gave into Ita's hand a little parcel of books. "I think," she said to Annie as they drove off, "that you are likely to be very happy. Mr. Derwent looks so good, so clever, and he is so handsome too."

"I almost wish sometimes he was not so much better and nicer than other people, as he is. I am afraid I am not half good enough for him."

"But you can grow more and more good. He will show you the way, and lead you on."

Annie shook her head. "I admire him more than I can say, but I do not feel as if I could keep up with him. I am afraid I shall lag behind."

"How you must have enjoyed walking with him, and hearing him talk to the poor people."

"It was very interesting. They seemed at first to listen only out of civility, but, after he had said a few words, they paid more

attention, and I could see that some of them were touched. Most of them promised to come to church."

"Going to church at Bramblemoor must be a very different thing from going to church at Holmwood or Marchbanks."

"Very different indeed. What a number of things Edgar has put up which are not seen elsewhere."

"There is something very nice about it. I never saw a church I liked so much before, that was not a Catholic one."

"But Edgar says ours is the Catholic Church, or, at any rate, a branch of it."

"And do you believe it, Annie?"

"In a sort of way I do; but you know I think he goes a great deal too far."

"But what is going too far?" Ita exclaimed. "What does it mean? I wish you would not always use those sort of vague expressions. Who shall decide what is far enough and not too far?"

"I have gone too far this way," said Annie, laughing; "and must turn round in this narrow lane. Now, do not talk to me just now. There, have not I done it beauti-

fully? How fond the school children seem of Edgar."

"You must not let him get too fond of Bramblemoor. He would make you forsake Holmwood."

"There is no fear of that; he is so passionately fond of it, and he has been telling me of a plan I like so much. Eliza Conway is engaged, he says, to a clergyman, a Mr. Roland, and when we are married, and he lives at Holmwood, he will make him his curate at Bramblemoor, and then they can marry also and live there. In the meantime she and a friend of hers are coming to live in a cottage and work among the poor and nurse the sick."

"I shall ask to help them. What a different thing life must be with real interests and objects."

"Yes, of course, it must be very nice to do a great deal of good, but I have not any talent for it; I am glad Edgar will manage all our charities. My aunt has done so till now, I always ask her about everything."

Mrs. Gerald had been paying Lady Emily a visit, and waiting for Annie to call and take

her home. She came down as soon as Ita told her that she had arrived. She was looking very ill; so much so, that both the girls were struck with her paleness; and she hardly spoke at all during the drive home, though Annie was longing to talk about Edgar and Bramblemoor.

"Would you like to live there?" her aunt asked at last in an absent manner.

"Oh dear no: how could I live there? he has only got a little tiny cottage."

"Poets talk of love in a cottage."

"I do not care about poets. Love in a nice country house is much better. How is Lady Emily?"

"Very feeble, and her mind wanders a little, I think, at times."

Mrs. Gerald became absent again. Poor woman! She was beginning to know what it is to suffer silently, secretly, increasingly; to have an unwelcome, strange, wretched, fanciful fear, haunting the waking hour and the sleepless night, mixing itself with every pleasant image, thrusting itself into each thought of the future, and mingling with it doubt and perplexity.

Ita had carried up to her room the little parcel of books Edgar had given her; and, after dinner, when Lady Emily had fallen asleep and Mr. Hendon had gone to his library, she too went to her study, a little recess in the corner of her room, lighted the candles, and began to examine those books. There must be many amongst us, of those that are now far advanced in age, who remember what an epoch it was in their lives when the various publications of the Oxford school began to be placed in their hands; how, after years of meagre, cold, lifeless, shallow religious observances, diversified perhaps by periodical fits of evangelical fervour or Calvinistic enthusiasm, alternating with vague yearnings and instinctive predilections for the Church of Rome, struggled against and repressed indeed, but forcing their way into minds which had come into contact with it; how, after this seeking for rest and finding none, a vision rose before them, a fair fabric, a seemly building, on the gates of which seemed inscribed, "Ye that enter in," not as in Dante's line, "leave all hope behind," but rather find the fulfilment of every hope and

sacred wish." It was like a dream of beauty and of joy to admit into our souls, our minds, and our prayers, the long-forbidden names and words, which had since childhood rung in our ears like a far distant music, the Catholic Church, the Blessed Virgin, the Festivals, the Fasts, All Saints and All Souls, Matins and Evensong, Confession and Absolution. All that we had heard of and gazed on with a sigh as lovely but dangerous visions, what every teacher of our youth and every clergyman of the Protestant Church of England had warned us against as Popish delusions, was placed before us as the truth, was offered to our acceptance in the most attractive and congenial form. The cathedrals and the old parish churches of our native land seemed to assume a new aspect, and the prayers we had so long used, to have a new meaning. There was a tranquillity, a dignity, an earnestness about the writers of that period and that school which took a great hold on the mind. The religious depth and literary merit of Dr. Newman's sermons, the exquisite poetry of the "Christian Year," the stories which, in various ways, illustrated church principles,

the lessons of self-training contained in Father Faber's and Archdeacon, now Archbishop Manning's writings—all did their work and prepared the soul for the reception of Catholic truth and discipline. It was very delightful to think that, without offending relatives or losing friends, we might become what many of us had longed to be, Catholics to all intents and purposes, Catholics after a fashion of our own indeed, but still a genuine and real fashion. A void was, as it were, filled up, a craving satisfied, a hope realized.

All this Ita felt as she examined the books she had brought home with her. They made a great impression on her mind; a new kind of existence seemed to open before her. There is a turning-point in many lives, a moment in which we perceive that there is a great inward work to be done, and the means by which to do it; when we see that religion, if it is anything, must be everything, that we must not give to our Creator less than all. The mere perception of this is an event in our spiritual history, and, if we do not turn back, it will lead us very far. This insight into a new world is sometines indistinct and

dim like the first hazy light of morning, sometimes sudden like a burst of sunshine. We begin to understand how a monotonous and obscure existence may be interesting, and life become more beautiful as it advances, instead of losing its charm and its value as we once feared it would when youth was at an end. In one shape or another this revelation is vouchsafed to all those whom God calls to a more than ordinary amount of devotedness to his service; and it was probably on that night that Ita sat in her little study, lighting one candle after another while she pored over Edgar's books, that the first ideas rose in her mind which were eventually to have the greatest influence over her fate. The calm, strong, simple tone of what she then read struck her wonderfully. There was something authoritative in it which she felt to be what she needed. It was a relief, like finding a wall to lean against when pushed about by a moving crowd. She repeated over and over again the words, "In quietness and in confidence shall be thy strength;" and they seemed to impart to her peace and energy. She could hardly read a

whole page through of any of those books which were revealing a new world to her, without shutting up the volume in her hand and musing in silence, as she walked up and down the room, or stood at the window gazing on the starlit sky, which had never seemed so wonderful to her before. Then taking pen in hand she made plans, drew up for herself rules, formed resolutions, and longed for the morning to begin putting them into practice. "In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength." The sentence rang in her ears, it seemed to have a magical power over her; not that she felt at that moment quiet, far from it, nor could she well have defined in whom or in what she had confidence; but there was light and strength in the distance, she foresaw, she felt it; an inward hidden life had quickened in her soul.

After a short sleep she woke with a consciousness of a change in her existence. She said her prayers more attentively, more fervently than was her wont. Even the service at the church at Marchbanks on the following Sunday seemed to her less tedious than usual. Some of the things she had read in Edgar's

books gave more interest to certain portions of the service; the idea which ran through them all that the Church of England was, after all, Catholic, though its catholicity had been so long disfigured and concealed, was traceable she felt in many of the prayers. She repeated the Creed with a new feeling—"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," was not then perhaps an empty phrase without any meaning in it! The absolution had some connection with those awful words of Scripture about binding and loosing which had so often puzzled her. It was difficult to look at Mr. Power and think of him as a priest, he was so utterly different from any of the persons she had been in the habit of considering as such; but the very activity of the debate which was going on in her own mind made the dulness of his sermon endurable. The rest of the day she spent in reading and musing over the various works which, with judicious care, Edgar had selected as most likely to give her a favourable bias towards High Church principles. She found in them much of what had so powerfully attracted her to Catholicism abroad—a reverence for anti-

quity—the use of time-honoured words and names—a poetry thrown over devotional duties and observances, which she did not fancy could ever have been met with out of the Church of Rome. Besides all this, she was struck with the moral and religious training which this system seemed to promise—that education of the soul, the development of which she had had very little opportunity of witnessing anywhere else, for she had gazed from without on the Catholic Church, she knew nothing of its inward treasures. Mrs. Sydney, indeed, had indicated that it possessed gifts of unspeakable power and virtue in those respects, but she had not had time to describe or analyze them; and neither experience nor memory at that time enabled Ita to fall back on anything superior to the teaching which the new views, set before her, seemed to promise.

The days which intervened between St. Thomas's Day and Christmas Eve were spent in this interesting study, and passed very quickly. Annie had promised that she and Mrs. Gerald would call for Ita at half-past eight on the Wednesday evening on their

way to Bramblemoor. The night was clear, cold, and starry—a beautiful night for the time of year. It was freezing, but the air so still that it did not feel very cold. The trees, bushes, hedges, and grass looked lovely, glittering with hoar frost in the bright moonlight. As they approached the village, the tinkling of the church bells was heard, joyously sounding a welcome to the worshippers that were crossing the common in various directions, attracted by the novelty of a service on that night and at that hour.

"What odd dreams one sometimes has!" Ita said, as they drove past a clump of elms, which stood on one side of the small churchyard. "I dreamt last night that I had been drowned and had come to life again."

"I never dreamt that," Annie answered, "but it really happened to me. Did not it, Aunt Gerald?"

"You were not actually drowned, but you were in danger of it."

"But did not I remain in the water long enough to be quite insensible?"

"Yes, my love. What are you looking at so earnestly, Ita?"

"I have such a strange dislike to moonlight. It always gives me a nervous feeling of faintness. It makes me quite ill."

The young girl had turned very pale. Mrs. Gerald took her hands in hers and found them cold. She drew her close to herself, and there was a wistful look in her face as she bent over her. As they drove up to the gate of the churchyard, and the carriage stopped, Ita said, "It is over now—I am well again." The colour had returned to her cheeks, and, when they entered the church, Mrs. Gerald was the palest of the two.

Never had any of the rural congregation, which met in the little church on that Christmas Eve, seen so pretty a sight before in a place of worship. The walls were hung with wreaths of holly, glowing with their coral berries. A large cross composed of flowers stood over the communion table, which was made to look as much like an altar as possible. Two lighted candles were on each side of it, and the whole of the building brightly illuminated. These decorations had a joyful effect on the hearts of all present.

Even Annie, the staunchest Protestant of the lot, could not help feeling pleased. The old-fashioned hymn—

> "Hark, the herald angels sing,
> Glory to the new-born King"—

was sung before the service; and, though the school children's voices were not particularly melodious, Edgar's deep bass notes and Ita's sweet voice made the simple chant seem full of beauty. After the prayers, the "Adeste Fideles," with English words, delighted Ita's ears—that air she had so often heard in Catholic churches, and which had such a familiar sound to her, seemed to establish a link between the worship she had secretly loved and the one she was beginning to feel attracted to. After the service was over, Edgar gave a short familiar instruction to his parishioners. He did not read it, but spoke words that seemed to come from his heart. Entirely new were the substance and style of this address to his listeners. He described in a familiar manner, even like one who might have seen it, the place where the Virgin Mother had taken refuge. He told

his hearers to fancy themselves there—to watch what went on—to picture to themselves the scene. He spoke of the Blessed Virgin gently, reverently, lovingly; and of the divine Infant in a fervent, earnest way, which made their hearts burn within them. Edgar had drunk deeply from the wells of Catholic piety, and his was a heart and a mind which could wonderfully exert influence, and captivate other hearts and minds. All who heard him that night were astonished at his simple eloquence; it certainly was eloquence, for whatever touches, moves, and persuades others must be so. One old man, as he left the church, said he had never known before what Christmas meant, and should think much more of it than he had hitherto done.

Ita was much impressed by the whole scene, and coming, as it did, upon the thoughts of the last few days, no wonder that it should affect her. She had no idea that an Anglican service could have moved her so much, and it must be true, she thought, that the Church of England was quite different from what she had supposed it to be. It must

have hidden merits which only required to be brought to light. The new resolutions she had made grew stronger; she resolved to be good, very good, more than commonly good. Edgar had spoken of the joyful tidings which the angels had announced to the shepherds, and then he had said that there was a day and an hour in many persons' lives, in which tidings of great joy were brought to them. An angel's voice seemed to whisper, for the first time, secrets concerning God and their souls. It was a strange joy, he said, that that voice sometimes promised, one from which the cowardly shrink, for it often presages suffering. Perhaps the shepherds who heard the angels' tidings on the green hills of Bethlehem were doomed soon afterwards to listen, in their desolate homes, to the loud cry of Rachel's anguish. God's special graces, he said, were the harbingers of special griefs, and the joys of Christians most fully felt by those on whom the shadow of the cross had rested since infancy.

Ita went home with these words in her ears and in her heart. "As they left the church she leant on Annie, and said, "Oh,

dear, darling Annie, how good you must always be, you who are to be Mr. Derwent's wife."

Annie looked unusually grave, and answered nothing. There was very liitle conversation in the carriage in which they all drove home. Before Ita was deposited at the back-door of Marchbanks house. Mrs. Gerald asked her if she thought Lady Emily would be well enough to see her, if she called in a day or two. Ita thought she would, unless she happened to have had a bad night; and thereupon they parted.

A new era had begun in Ita's life. The glimpse she had had of the gaieties of the world at Carsdale, had made little impression upon her. She would never have been in danger of becoming worldly and frivolous; other dangers and other snares she might have found on her way through life. She might have gone into extremes of various kinds; she might have indulged in hero-worship of a false and perilous nature. She was just at the age when the character is apt to take a new direction. If she had

seen more of Mrs. Sydney, her influence would, perhaps, have induced her to enter at once on the question of the claims and merits of the Church of Rome; and she would then, probably, have joined it, and her own fate and that of others been different from what it eventually proved. But Edgar's arrival at Bramblemoor—the opening of the church there—the services she attended—the sermons she heard, and the books she read, took an entire hold of her mind. What religious writers called first fervours were kindled in her soul. Those are wonderful days in which nothing seems hard or difficult, when there is a joy in every opportunity for exertion or sacrifice—when the will seems to rush forward to the accomplishment of everything which the mind lays hold of in the way of duty—when doctrines hitherto unknown or misunderstood assume a mastery over us which results in new practices, new thoughts, a new and cheering sense of what we are living, hoping, and striving for. Divine consolations, in mercy given to lead the soul onward, mingle with human feelings, which in those early days of the spiritual life prevail largely,

though unconsciously, in much of what seems to ourselves to be piety, and to others excitement. Ita felt as if she had never been happy before. Everything connected with religion had become pleasant. She took delight in getting up at daybreak, whatever the weather might be—rain, sleet, snow, wind, or mist—and with her waterproof cloak and umbrella, walking swiftly across the park and the common, a good three miles, to the morning service. The tinkling of the bell used to sound pleasantly in her ears as she faced the cold north wind, and there was a consciousness of making a great exertion, of despising luxury and comfort, of doing something out of the common way, which produced a particularly agreeable sensation of self-approval; not blamable, good as a beginning, but perhaps a little tainted by self-complacency. She, the school children, and three or four other persons, made up the congregation on week-days. She wondered Annie did not come, forgetting that she lived seven miles off, and must have had the coachman and servants up at a most inconveniently early hour; and, when she was

reminded of this, her wonder changed into pity. One day that she was expressing this feeling, Annie exclaimed, "I think it is just as well to say one's prayers at home; so, if I went, it would not be for the sake of the prayers, but to hear Edgar's voice and see him, which is to me the greatest happiness in the world. It is on that account I don't go to Bramblemoor even on Sundays. I might be thinking more of him than of my prayers."

"I should have thought," Ita replied, "that such a feeling as yours for Mr. Derwent would have helped you to pray more fervently. I think that to admire and love any one on earth very much makes one love God so much more. I remember once reading that somebody said of St. Francis of Sales, the Holy Bishop of Geneva, who wrote that book Mr. Derwent likes so much, 'The Introduction to a Devout Life,' 'If Monsieur de Genéve is so good, how good must God, who made him, be.' When I feel an enthusiasm about good people, I always have had that idea in my mind. But, Annie, when you are married, and if Mr. Derwent is Vicar

of Holmwood, you will be obliged to go to church there."

"Of course I shall, it will be my duty to do so. On the whole I am not sure that I am glad Edgar is a clergyman."

"Oh, Annie, it is such a beautiful useful life!"

"But it is a very engrossing one. I really see very little of him."

"But cannot you be yourself engrossed in it? Cannot you make every one of his interests yours, and work for him, both in his absence and in his presence. He should be the sun and you the moon of his parish; whilst he shines by his virtues and his eloquence, you should win hearts by your gentleness and sweetness. If all wives ought to be helpmates, clergymen's wives should be so more especially."

"Your flights are too high for me. I cannot make myself into a moon. I have no talent for winning hearts."

"Yet how much loved you are."

"I have not won anybody's heart that I know of. Those who care for me have done

so without my having anything to do with it. Have you heard that Eliza Conway is coming next week to Bramblemoor ?"

"Yes. The schoolmistress told me so. She is to live with her and nurse the sick, and I am to spend three days in the week working with her, when Lady Emily can spare me; and she is often now quite willing I should be away for the whole day. She dozes over her knitting, and does not want anybody but her maid."

"Is it true that you go twice a day sometimes for the service to Bramblemoor ?"

"Yes, but it tires me very much; and now, if I can stay between whiles with Eliza and be of use there, it will be a great relief."

"I hear you do not eat meat now on Fridays."

Ita coloured; for she had begun with a kind of eager excitement to act upon Edgar's advice in that respect. Nothing could exceed her zeal in complying with his instructions; whatever he intimated in his sermons that it would be well to do, she instantly practised, but she had not as yet had any private con-

versation with him, or been much in his society. Her admiration of him was unbounded; but there was one point alone about which she did not feel as if she should ever be able to practise what he told her he hoped his parishioners would many of them do when he was ordained priest. She could never, she thought, go to confession to him. She could not analyze her feeling on that subject. She could imagine that it would be a great help, a great consolation, to kneel at the feet of some grey-headed, venerable, old man, and accuse herself of all the sins and miseries of her life; and that to hear words of absolution addressed individually to herself would be the greatest of comforts; but it must be under peculiar circumstances — her secrets spoken to an unknown ear, and the message of God conveyed to her soul by an unknown voice.

Edgar worked very hard, and it was true that he had not much time to give to Holmwood and Annie. She was very patient with him, though somewhat exacting with others. There is nothing more touching than the gentleness of a self-willed person under the

influence of a strong affection. Without taking any very keen interest in his plans, she listened with unwearied attention to all he said, because it was he who said it. She helped him to the best of her ability—not that she could see the use of many of the things which he wished to do and establish in his church and parish—but still in deference to what she considered his better judgment, she assisted him with money to effect these changes whenever he wished it. She read the books he recommended assiduously, attentively, but without result as far as conviction went. Some of the moral lessons and religious ideas in the "Plain Sermons," and other works of the Oxford school, she admired, but her practical, positive, unimaginative mind could neither see consistency nor reason in the theory on which Anglicanism is built, nor enable her to do without seeing it. It seemed to her utterly illogical in principle, and, as it did not accord with her tastes and inclinations, she turned from it with pain indeed, because she would have very much desired to feel and think like Edgar, but with an increasing dislike and

suspicion. The only merit she could see in Anglicanism was, that some people were kept by it from Roman Catholicism, which she hated still more. It certainly had that good result, she thought, in Ita's case, and of that she was very glad.

CHAPTER VIII.

Soon after Christmas, Mrs. Gerald had paid a long visit to Lady Emily Hendon. She had found her much altered in looks, and evidently very ill. They had begun by talking of various indifferent subjects, and then Mrs. Gerald said, in an indifferent manner also, "How well Miss Flower is looking!"

"She is very well, I think," Lady Emily languidly replied.

"Annie and I like her so much."

"I am very glad you do. It is such a good thing she should make friends, for I am sure I shall not live long, and I cannot think what she is to do when I die. Perhaps you could suggest something?"

"I hope, dear Lady Emily, that you are mistaken, and that you will live a long time

yet. But has not Miss Flower any relatives?"

"No; not a soul that anybody knows of. I may as well tell you about her. The people I took her from had picked her up at sea, somewhere on the coast. They were fishermen going to Corsica. They took the baby into their boat, and brought her home with them some months afterwards. They used sometimes to beg from travellers on the plea of having adopted this baby. She was very pretty; and when, two or three years afterwards, some of my friends thought it would amuse me to have a child in the house, they told me of this little thing, and I adopted her and brought her up. We called her 'Margarita,' the Pearl of the Sea, it seemed so appropriate, and she called herself 'Ita.' She has always been a good, dear little thing. I wish now I had married her to somebody abroad; you cannot well arrange that sort of thing here, and really I do not know what she is to do when I die. I shall leave her something, of course, but I have not much besides my jointure. You cannot think, I suppose, of any one who would like to

marry her. She will have four thousand pounds."

There was something husky in Mrs. Gerald's voice as she answered, "No, I cannot say I do. I suppose she was given up to you altogether?"

"Yes! Those people signed a paper to that effect. I dare say Mr. Hendon would be kind to her if I died; but it would not suit him, I am sure, to have a girl to take care of."

"You will get better soon, and return to Mentone," Mrs. Gerald answered, as if trying to say something.

"Oh, no! I am more ill than you suppose. I ought never to have come to England."

Mrs. Gerald inwardly re-echoed the words, but not on Lady Emily's account. It was for her own sake that she felt it. What was the importance of a few more or less years of existence to a languishing invalid, compared with the doubt which had arisen in her own mind, and which had begun to embitter her existence.

To understand this it is necessary to go

back some years, and describe what happened at the time of her eldest brother's death. It has already been said that her affection for him was the strongest feeling of her heart, and that her dislike to her younger brother, Edgar's father, had dated equally from childhood. Herbert Derwent had never shared hers and her brother Robert's attachment to Holmwood, or any of those family feelings which were so marked a feature in their characters. He was a selfish, careless, extravagant young man, who professed to hate living in the country, and had been known to say that, if the old place ever came into his hands, he would sell it as soon as he could. Mrs. Gerald had brooded over those words with profound resentment and indignation. He married in a way which did not particularly tend to please his relatives, and they became still more estranged from him, and in consequence he from them and from Holmwood. It was, therefore, with an intense joy that Mrs. Gerald, soon after her widowhood, heard of her eldest brother's marriage, and some months afterwards welcomed him and his

young wife at Nice, where she had remained since her husband's death. They spent the winter there, and Mrs. Derwent, towards the end of February, gave birth to a little girl. As soon as she was recovered from her confinement, she travelled on with her husband and child to Florence and Rome. Mrs. Gerald was to meet them at Genoa, on their way back, and thither she went on one of those days in May, which in Italy fulfils everything that poets of every age have sung or said of that smiling month. She travelled along the Corniche road, lately opened, revelling in the matchless beauty of scenes which pass before the eye like visions which it would fain retain and dwell on in protracted admiration, but which too quickly succeed each other, like dreams of a fairer world than our own. What will it be when we are carried at railroad speed through that dazzling magnificence of earth, sea, and sky. Will beauty penetrate the mind henceforward as deeply, will it mould the fancy and saturate the soul as in days of yore, now that one glance only is allowed at objects which a poet would once have gazed on for

hours with the silent worship of passion or of prayer?"

A delightful anticipation of approaching enjoyment mingled in Mrs. Gerald's heart with the emotions of that journey. She fondly loved her young sister-in-law; and the little baby who had been born in her house had become the dearest object of interest to her. She was cold in manner, but when she loved it was very intensely. This little child, though a girl, was to inherit Holmwood if she had no brother. It was only to pass to Herbert or his children if Robert had none. This new treasure of their lives was to be carried back that summer to the old home, was to grow up in the love of it, and, as she looked at the little brown creatures playing in the olive woods or on the sandy shores of the Riviera, the thought of "our baby," "our little Annie," "our child," was ever in her mind. Robert Derwent had married rather late in life, and, therefore, all the joy of his wedded life and the sweetness of loving his child had come as a new happiness to his sister. When she approached Genoa her heart beat with glad

impatience; when the proud and beautiful city, *Genova la Superba*, burst on her delighted sight, her eyes still turned towards the sea and to the countless sails on the bosom of the broad bay, and of the wide realm of blue sunny waters beyond, with a bound of eager hope and exulting delight. "To-night," she thought, "to-night perhaps, at latest to-morrow, I shall see my own dear ones, the only ones on earth whom I love and who love me: his dear kind face; her smile when she shows me the baby in her short clothes; his quiet delight; Maud's 'Oh, Aunt Gerald!' for so she always called her." She pictured it all, she lived through it many times in thought, never again in reality.

That night there was a storm, fearful and sudden, and a great darkness, and, near the entrance of the bay, two steamers came in collision; one went down, the other was shattered to pieces. From the former only two human beings escaped—a cabin-boy was picked up with a child in his arms.

Mrs. Gerald had received the night before a letter which said her brother with his wife and baby had sailed from Leghorn in the

steamer "Acquilea," and the news was brought her in the morning that the vessel had gone down and all on board of her were lost. A few hours afterwards when she was sitting in the dull hopeless stupor that a sudden and extraordinary calamity brings on, the English Consul asked to speak to her. He said a little girl, apparently three or four months old, had been saved by a sailor, who was the only survivor besides that child of the passengers in the "Acquilea;" that the night-gown this baby had on was marked with the initials A. D., and that the boy said he thought it was the child of an English gentleman and lady who had a cabin to themselves. The rush of something between renewed anguish and an awakened hope, with its whole future of consolation, roused at once Mrs. Gerald; and, though the instant before she would have been incapable of stirring, she sprang now to her feet and insisted on immediately going to see the child. She felt at once that any question of recognizing a baby only four months old and whom she had not seen for three months was out of the question; that as far as that went

she could not trust her own impressions; but the night-gown she would of course be able to identify, as she had herself helped her sister-in-law to prepare, and, in particular, to get marked, the clothes for little Annie. The letters A. D. seemed to float before her eyes as she walked to the Spedale, and the intense excitement of her mind seemed for a while to overcome the terrible suffering she endured. It was a strange moment for her when she was led up to the woman who was nursing the baby. Kneeling down she looked at it with inexpressible eagerness. The eyes seemed to her like those of her infant niece, and there was nothing in the small features dissimilar to the little face she remembered. But when the night-gown was produced, every doubt vanished. It was certainly Annie's. Not only did the initials prove it, but Mrs. Gerald recognized the pattern of the lace trimming which she had herself chosen.

The cabin-boy was summoned and cross-examined. "Was there more than one infant on board?"

Three he believed, but he could not tell if

they were boys or girls; the English Signora's child was a girl he knew.

How did he get hold of this little child?

Somebody gave it to him to hold just as the crash took place. Everybody was running about in confusion. "For the love of the Madonna, take the creature," some one said.

That could not have been Robert or Maud, Mrs. Gerald thought, but she did not say a word.

"Had this English lady and gentleman Italian servants?" the Consul asked.

"Sicuro," the boy replied; "the baby had an Italian nurse."

In an agitated voice Mrs. Gerald declared that the night-gown was sufficient evidence that this was her little niece, and appealed to the Consul, who agreed with her, that the evidence appeared conclusive, but suggested at the same time that some one should come from Florence who had lately seen the child, and could testify to her identity.

Mrs. Gerald took the baby home with her, and from that moment was absorbed in the care of this little being, who, in consequence

of the exposure and fatigue she had undergone, was for a long time in a precarious condition. In a short time, the master of the hotel where Mr. and Mrs. Derwent had been staying at Florence, and one of the servants there, arrived for the purpose of declaring whether the little girl so wonderfully preserved on the night of the accident was their child. They no doubt perceived with Italian acuteness that there was a passionate desire on the rich English lady's part that their evidence might corroborate the fact; and, not having, probably, any distinct impression to the contrary, they did not hesitate to assure her and other witnesses, in the presence of the Consul, that the Bambina was the little Signorina Anna, the daughter of that poor lady and gentleman whose fate had made so great a sensation at Florence, as well as at Genoa.

There the matter rested—no one called in doubt, and nobody did doubt, that Annie Derwent had been rescued from a watery grave, and she lived to be the idol of her aunt. Herbert Derwent did not question it, nor did he long survive his brother. Strange

to say, the only person on whose mind the faintest shadow of a doubt remained was Mrs. Gerald herself. She believed what she had asserted, her reason was satisfied by the evidence, and every feeling enlisted on the side of that belief. It would have been despair to her to have doubted it, for her whole soul, from the first days of that dreadful grief, was wrapped up in the rescued child, but with the nervous, self-tormenting which belongs to some natures—that proneness to a secret harrowing, analyzing of transient thoughts and unacknowledged misgivings which exist in some reserved characters, she had sometimes inward arguments with herself in which, what seemed to her the devil's advocate, was perpetually suggesting every sort of possible supposition which might affect the evidence which, to indifferent persons, seemed conclusive.

As little Annie advanced in age, she watched for a family likeness to her parents, or to any members of her family, with a feverish anxiety. It so happened that no such resemblance did appear. Of course this was no real evidence against her identity,

but still it tormented Mrs. Gerald, and she had a nervous fear that others, also, might notice this. It was partly for this reason that she collected all the family pictures in her own room, and even there screened them from sight. If anybody remarked that Annie was not like her parents, it caused her a paroxysm of pain. If she could have seen a gesture, a look, a habit of any kind, which bore in it an hereditary stamp, the relief would have been great. Sometimes she held her head with both her hands and tried to crush this ever-recurring mental strife. She told herself that even if she had the least suspicion that Annie was not Annie (and she would writhe at the bare thought of such a supposition), she would not be justified in harbouring it. Since others had accepted the evidence as sufficient, even those interested to disprove it, she had no business to question it even for an instant; it seemed like treachery towards that idolized child, and it was this secret, involuntary misgiving which made her particularly anxious that Annie should marry her cousin Edgar. In no possible case, then, would any one be wronged, and she felt she

would be a happier person when that matter was settled. A new nervousness, however, had now taken possession of her mind—a new fear, doubt, presentiment, delusion, fancy, whatever it was, had begun to haunt her. It began on the day when she had called for the first time at Marchbanks—the very moment she set her eyes on Ita Flower. What for twenty years she had looked for in vain—what for twenty years she had been pining to see in Annie's face, that girl had, she saw it at once—a striking likeness to her late sister-in-law. The brown eyes, the long dark lashes, the dimples in her cheeks, the full lips, the small mouth, the very picture her memory was for ever drawing, seemed to stand before her eyes. It did not at first suggest any idea beyond an accidental resemblance; but even that awoke in her a sort of jealousy. It seemed so hard that a stranger could be so like what Maud Derwent had been, and her own child bear no resemblance to her. She felt at once attracted by Ita, and yet indisposed towards her. Annie was handsome and good, and some people admired very much her fine counte-

nance and bright glance; but Mrs. Gerald had never been herself so painfully conscious of a want of grace and charm in her manner as after making acquaintance with Ita. She wished not to see this grace and charm, she tried not, but it so happened that they were exactly what naturally most captivated her. This struggle went on till the time of the visit to Carsdale, and there she heard that Ita was not the daughter of any of Lady Emily's friends, but a child adopted abroad—"*picked up at sea.*"

It would be impossible to describe the tumult which these words raised in Mrs. Gerald's mind — the sickening terror of mental suffering which seized upon her. It was as if the faint misgiving, which had so long haunted her, had suddenly assumed a real tangible form. It was, however, too painful a possibility to contemplate when anything of reality became connected with it. She had not repulsed the shadowy doubt of past days, with the vehemence with which she thrust back the grave question which the present was forcing upon her. She fought against it with a desperate resolution. She

argued, with herself, that it would be wrong even to give the subject a thought; to re-open the case, as it were, which no one but herself would ever dream of reconsidering. But whenever, from that moment, she heard Ita's voice, or laugh, whenever—which she avoided as much as she could—she looked at her, the feeling returned; the likeness haunted her. She could not bear to turn her eyes on the picture in her room, nor could she contain herself sometimes when Ita said or did something, which seemed quite insignificant to others, but had some peculiar effect upon herself. The way she had of throwing up her hands when surprised or pleased; or of sitting clasping her knee and bending forward, when listening to something which particularly interested her, brought her young sister-in-law so vividly before Mrs. Gerald, that she felt as if she should go out of her mind. And yet it might all be fancy, she might be giving the most ridiculous importance to an accidental resemblance. Sometimes she thought of showing the picture in her room to Mr. Pratt, and asking him if *he* saw the likeness—even of telling him of her

misery on the subject; but when she set about acting on that thought, she recoiled from it with terror. It was an absurd, nervous fancy, which it was her duty to keep under and suppress. In the meantime, her feeling towards Ita was a strange one. At times it would almost have seemed as if she hated her, and yet at others an irrepressible tenderness stole into her heart and manner. All this was taking place in the soul of a person who had all the sufferings of an impetuous nature, without the relief of an expansive disposition. Storms passed over her face; but they never burst forth in words, and seldom in tears. It was like fire in a vase, which would not break.

It was on a day when as usual this inward strife had been raging, that she felt impelled to go and see Lady Emily Hendon. The present state of her mind seemed to her—as is always the case when we are suffering—the most intolerable she could conceive. A little more or a little less reason to think of that extraordinary possibility would be a relief; for now and then she could not help feeling, "Oh! if that was Robert's child—if

she was, after all, the little infant Annie I received into my arms at Nice, and made him kiss for the first time." She wept over this recollection, and then her own darling, her beloved, real Annie came smiling into the room, and she was frightened at having, even for a minute, dwelt on the doubt. The visit to Marchbanks was paid a day or two afterwards. A pause in the conversation, which has been already related, ensued after Lady Emily had expressed the wish that she had never come to England. Mrs. Gerald at last said, "If it should be God's will, Lady Emily, that you should die before Miss Flower is married, I promise you that I will do all I can for her. But will you allow me to say that it would be a great object in such a case to place that paper you spoke of—I mean the document that was drawn up and signed by the people who gave her up to you—in safe hands. I suppose it contains the date of the day when she was found."

"Oh! yes, I suppose so; but I have not got it here. I think I must have left it in my bureau at Mentone; but it is so long since I have seen it, that I am not quite sure."

"That is very unfortunate. One would think that it must have been extremely important to preserve every particular connected with Miss Flower's history. Do you remember what it said about the date, and the part of the coast where she was found?"

"It was somewhere on the coast of the Riviera; but rather far out at sea, I think. We always keep her birthday on St. Margaret's day—her *festa*, as they say at Mentone—but, you know, the day she was found of course was not her birthday."

"But when was it?"

"I really do not remember."

"Do you remember which year it was?"

"I think it was twenty-one years ago."

"As much as that?"

"Well, it might be twenty; I am not sure. By the way, I think it was only eighteen. No, no—twenty."

Mrs. Gerald threw herself back in her chair with a feeling of despair. "Do you recollect hearing if there were any initials on her clothes when she was found?"

"No, I don't think there were; but by this time it cannot signify, you know."

"Have you any servants who lived with you at the time you adopted Miss Flower?"

"Not here. My maid, who was with me then, died two years ago. Her husband lives at Mentone."

"Would Mr. Hendon remember about that paper and its contents?"

"I dare say he would. No, by the way, he would not; for he was asking me about it the other day."

"I must say that it appears to me inconceivable that you should have allowed so important a circumstance to escape your memory, as whether or not there were any initials on the child's clothes."

"I never heard whether she had any clothes at all. I wanted a child to adopt, and was told it would be a great charity to take this one, as she belonged to nobody. That is all I recollect. You are a very fortunate person, Mrs. Gerald, if your own experience has not shown you that people cannot always remember things, but you have not been like me, an invalid for thirty years."

"But that paper ought to have been

kept," Mrs. Gerald answered, with a heightened colour.

"I have no doubt I have it safe at Mentone," Lady Emily replied, with a look of weariness, which implied what was indeed passing through her mind. "Really, when I asked you to be kind to that girl I did not mean to be bored in this way."

"Will you write for that paper?" Mrs. Gerald persisted.

"Nobody could find it but myself. What makes you so anxious about it?"

If Lady Emily had not been short-sighted, and the room darkened on account of the weakness of her eyes, she must have observed the agitation which her pettish question caused. With a tremulous voice Mrs. Gerald answered: "I think it very unfair to Miss Flower that this record of the only fact which could throw any light on her birth, should not be forthcoming."

"I think, dear Mrs. Gerald, that I am likely to be more anxious about her interests than you can be. It is only a question of time. The paper is either at the bottom of one of my trunks here, or in my bureau at

Mentone; it cannot be anywhere else. If I die, my executors will find it. I do not see why, weak and ill as I am, I should worry and fatigue myself with a useless search for it. And, after all, I really cannot imagine that, whether those initials were A. B. or D. C., it can make an atom of difference to Ita. Have you heard," she continued, in the tone of a person determined to change the subject of conversation, "have you heard that Lord Carsdown is going to stand for the county at the next election instead of Mr. Bayham?"

"Yes; I heard it mentioned the other day. I cannot help sometimes regretting that my nephew Edgar has gone into the Church. I think he would have made an admirable speaker. He might have played a part in political life, and been a very distinguished man."

"He has very odd ideas, has he not?"

"He is very High Church."

"But, dear Mrs. Gerald, surely, when I left England, to be High Church meant everything most sensible and quiet. It was what almost all the Archbishops and Bishops

were. The Evangelical party was the one that did strange things then—not going to the play or to balls, and eating cold meat on Sundays, and all that sort of thing."

"Great changes have happened since then," Mrs. Gerald answered. "It is very curious to observe the phases through which the mind of a nation passes."

"Since Ita has heard Mr. Derwent preach, she does not eat meat on Fridays. I do not think that can be good for her. I asked my doctor, and he says it will not do her any harm. But I do think she takes too long walks in the morning, and now I hear she is going to nurse sick people with a Miss Conway. I hope she will not go anywhere where there is fever. But her life is so dull here that I am really glad of anything that amuses her, poor child! There is no accounting for tastes. I find much talking tires me very much, and so I cannot be a very agreeable companion for her."

This hint about much talking induced Mrs. Gerald soon to take her leave. The visit had not tended to throw a feather's weight into the scales which she was con-

tinually weighing in her own mind without daring to ask herself what she would do if one of the two should ever happen to kick the beam. Two strange fears—two strange doubts—two strange loves it might almost be said, were perpetually contending with each other in her weary soul. The old deep love of bygone years, and the actual passionate affection of half a lifetime, rushed against each other in contending eddies of self-reproach, whether she harboured or repulsed the thoughts which forced themselves upon her with a relentless pertinacity.

CHAPTER IX.

The 13th of January was a happy day for Ita. Eliza Conway had arrived at Bramblemoor on the preceding afternoon, and taken possession of two little rooms above the grocer's shop, for which he had been only too pleased to find so good a tenant. Eliza was engaged to be married to a clergyman. Her ideas on the subject of the celibacy of Anglican priests had been modified, in the first place, in favour of Edgar's peculiar case, and since then in favour of the above-mentioned excellent, hard-working curate, in whose parish she had been labouring for more than a year in London, and who had recently proposed to her. Eliza's ideas were seldom, if ever, changed by the influence of other people; but, in some instances, they underwent a spontaneous change, and she was as

earnest and confident in her own opinions for the time being, as if they had always remained the same. She had a peculiar talent for drawing fine distinctions, and it was fortunate she possessed that power; for, with her great anxiety always to act in the most perfect manner possible, it might have often been difficult without it to reconcile even in her own mind her former opinions with present views and intentions.

From the time she had determined to marry Mr. Roland, she had been full of the project of a sort of confraternity of clergymen's wives with a preparatory noviciate for young women disposed to enter that state of life. She thought clergymen might be bound, or at any rate advised, to choose their wives from amongst this class of ladies. She did not, indeed, adopt Dr. Hook's memorable suggestion that the wives of the clergy should act as confessors to the women of their parishes; for she understood too well the Catholic doctrine on the subject of the Sacrament of Penance to advocate this extraordinary innovation, but she thought,

and so far perhaps rightly enough, that the kind of duties generally performed by the wives of English clergymen would be all the more efficiently executed, if a special training and appropriate teaching had prepared them for the exercise of active charity, and semi-ministerial functions. It was, therefore, with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength—with that honesty of purpose and fervent zeal which are the redeeming points of our times, and the element through which modern society, with all its vices and errors, may yet be saved, even as ten righteous men, could they have been found, would have averted a fiery deluge from the cities of the plain—that she resolved to devote the time that was to elapse before her marriage could take place, to a life of poverty and labour in a place where she could hear from the pulpit what she believed to be true, where she would not have mentally to protest against almost every word her clergyman uttered, or be obliged when she taught poor children, or spoke to sick people, to express herself in ambiguous language, which might afford them a chance

of imbibing Catholic doctrines or consolations, and yet not expose her to the censures of her spiritual pastors.

In the great majority of parishes in England this would have been her position, and she was right to avoid the harassing dilemma. But it is impossible not to be struck with the thought of the number of persons in the Established Church who have no option as to the teaching they shall receive, and of the anomaly that lies in the very words that imply that this is or ought to be a matter of choice on the part of individuals. For how are the poor and ignorant to recognize the boundary line which divides the orthodox from the heretic, the Catholic priest (*sic*) from the Protestant minister, who both call themselves clergymen of the Church of England?—how settle for themselves when they ought to accept or to reject the teaching of their spiritual pastors and masters, and laying their finger on the spot in the graduating scale, at the foot of which, for instance, the present Dean of Ripon takes his stand, and at the top of which the ritualistic incumbent of St. Alban's, Holborn, holds his

position—decide when a humble and docile soul is or is not to "hear the Church," and accept its doctrines on trust. It is said that there is but one single moment when a pear is ripe enough and not too ripe—the chances are greatly against its being picked at that moment. It would be an equally delicate point to fix on the shade of opinion in the Church of England that would be pronounced orthodox by even a small number of those who call themselves its members.

Edgar's parishioners, poor, neglected, and unlettered men and women, were neither competent nor disposed to offer any opposition to him, or to take umbrage at the High Church teaching and practices he at once proceeded to introduce amongst them. They became associated in their minds with the charity and kindness of their new clergyman, with many comforts bestowed upon them in sickness, with visits on the one hand from Lady Emma Cars, and on the other from Miss Derwent, which ended in warm gowns, waistcoats, and flannel petticoats for the aged—shoes for the children—situations in good families for the young girls—and school feasts connected

more or less, with the Church services. This was better, they thought, than anything the Methodist chapel on the other side of the common had ever done for them; and, as one old man expressed it, the new clergyman's religion would serve his purpose as well as anything else. But there was something beyond this after a while, especially when Eliza Conway had settled in the village, and Ita came most days to help her in her work. It would not have been possible that three young ardent souls, two of which were carrying out long-cherished hopes and desires, and the third, in the full fervour of a recent change from indifference and listlessness to strong religious impressions, should have failed to win the hearts and influence the lives of those amongst whom they laboured. For they were bringing to long neglected but, generally speaking, not hardened or vicious persons, tidings of great joy; they were teaching them some of the principal truths of Christianity, and in good faith what they themselves believed to be true—they were raising them by prayer and worship, to new conceptions of what is good and beautiful.

At a time when Anglicanism did not pretend to an unreal identity of doctrine and similarity of ceremonial with the Catholic Church, but directed its efforts to the maintenance of some important Christian truths, to the cultivation of a piety more fervent and more sober than that which had hitherto prevailed in the Church of England, and a more reverential and attractive mode of worship, a real improvement was often seen in congregations under the influence of clergymen of the new school. They were advancing themselves and leading on others towards Catholic truth, and with the heart and spirit of apostles devoting themselves to the work before them.

In Edgar Derwent's case there was at once a great zeal for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners, and also an eager interest in the success of a system, the merits of which he felt he was now himself putting to the test. He was not a vain man, perhaps not even a proud one, but self-reliant to no ordinary degree. He could not see anything except from one point of view; he would have died sooner than do anything he did not think

right, but then what he was determined to do he always did manage to think right. There was, in this respect, a likeness between him and Eliza Conway, but with this difference—she had not his abilities, his gifts, his charm of mind and manners, but she had a more devout mind, and greater personal humility. His character would have seemed at first sight one very independent of the sympathy of others, nevertheless he prized it more than could have been supposed. To feel that he was admired, excited him to excel—to know he was appreciated, helped him to persevere.

For instance, Ita's constant attendance at the daily service in his church stimulated his fervour. The profound attention with which she listened to his sermons made him more eloquent. Her eager adoption of his opinions gave him the most intense satisfaction. He had been the means of counteracting the fatal bias, for so he considered it, which had inclined her towards the Church of Rome—he had seen her adopt one by one all his views, and put in practice whatever he recommended. He expected her to furnish a

glorious proof of what the Catholic teaching of the Church of England can effect in training an impulsive character, leading forward a generous soul, and disciplining a superior intellect. Like a fine instrument which responds to the player's touch, her whole disposition seemed to be undergoing a transformation under his influence. His example, his advice, his books, and his sermons were gradually forming her into his ideal of a Christian woman. She was finding new elements of strength, of peace, and of happiness in the life of prayer and of labour she was beginning to lead. Her gratitude to him was real, and he deserved it at her hands; for never can anything cancel the debt we owe to those who at any time, or in any measure, and however imperfectly, have been the means of bringing us to know and love our Creator and Saviour: and it was in the little church where Edgar ministered that Ita had taken the first step in that direction; for up to that time nothing but transient emotions or occasional desires to be good and to serve God had crossed her soul. He had taught her to pray by rule, not by mere impulse; to

examine her conscience; to love the poor in a Christian manner. She owed him much, and on the other hand she helped him a great deal in his parish work. There was a charm in Ita which told on everybody she approached. It was felt by the rough peasantry of the moorlands as much as by persons of refinement and education. She had a gift which, when it is joined with quick tender feelings and earnestness of spirit, exercises a wonderful influence on all sorts of persons. It is not wit—not even humour; it is what the French call, *le mot pour rire*. It is like the ripple of the stream; it gladdens everything, and gladness is so much wanted by weary hearts. A smile on the face of a poor man has a countless value. "She is a bit of sunshine;" "she is a good sight for sore eyes;" "she is a terrible one for cheering one up," were common sayings in the mouths of the poor, as Ita went in and out of their cottages.

As to herself, this kind of life was like the beginning of a new existence. Her natural activity had, for the first time, found an object, her conscience was at rest, her

devotional instincts satisfied. The evenings, between Mr. Hendon, who read, and Lady Emily, who slept, she found no longer dull. She read volume after volume of religious and controversial writings with unflagging interest, and watched eagerly in the newspapers for everything relating to the Oxford movement. The Church principles she heard so much of were connected in her mind with the new interests, the new feelings, the new happiness which filled her soul.

The winter passed pleasantly and quickly by. The only person who did not look well or happy at Holmwood was Mrs. Gerald. She sometimes seemed anxious to fix an early day after Easter for Annie's marriage, and at other moments to delay it. She announced that, as soon as it was over, she should settle in a little cottage of her own by the seaside; and, one day that Ita was alone with her, she said, abruptly, "What do you mean to do when Lady Emily dies?" This question took the poor girl by surprise. She had often enough put it to herself, but to be asked it in this sudden manner was painful. Her eyes filled with tears, and she remained

silent. Then Mrs. Gerald said, in a faltering voice, "Would you come and live with me?"

Ita looked up very much surprised. She had fancied Mrs. Gerald disliked her, and this proposal was perfectly unexpected. Some time before it would have given her pleasure; now she was touched and grateful; but a change had lately taken place in her wishes and feelings. Thoughts had been running in her mind about joining one of the sisterhoods that Edgar Derwent's friends had begun to establish. There was a question of founding a small community of that kind at Bramblemoor, and she had almost made up her mind to ask to be admitted. She made, therefore, a grateful but evasive answer to Mrs. Gerald's inquiry, and the subject dropped, perhaps to the relief of both, for they never felt at their ease with one another.

Time went on. Lent was nearly over. One morning, in April, Annie was sitting in the flower-garden with Eliza, who was spending a few days with her to rest after a short attack of illness, and Ita, who had come over from Marchbanks for the day.

Eliza was reading a letter; she looked up, and said, "Ita, Miss Dorrell and Miss Mainwright, Sister Mary and Sister Anna, you know, are very much inclined to take the red house on the common, the largest of the two, and to begin at once, if you make up your mind to join them when poor Lady Emily no longer requires your care."

There was a dead silence. Eliza had let a terrible cat out of the bag. If there was one thing Annie disliked more than another, it was convents, and the imitation of monastic life amongst Anglicans she especially could not endure. Edgar was to have broken to her the scheme about the contemplated sisterhood at Bramblemoor, but he had put off doing so, and this was the first time she had heard of it. She fixed her eyes on Ita with a look of inquiry and of displeasure. There was as much of a sneer in that look as was possible in a countenance the characteristic expression of which was openness. Annie could look angry, but not easily scornful. As to Ita, she blushed deeply—she really did not know why—but the disagreeable consciousness that she was doing so increased her con-

fusion, and, at last, from mere nervousness, she burst into tears.

Both Eliza and Annie looked distressed. The former supposed that she must have changed her mind with regard to the plan she had been so eager about till then, and was afraid of being taken at her word. So she quickly said, "Do not be alarmed, my dear Ita; you need not give any answer about it just now. I thought you were longing to know what they said about the house. I must write some letters before post-time; so if you will excuse me, Annie, I will go in for a little while."

Annie made a rather ungracious nod, and, when she was gone, said to Ita, "What made you cry just now?"

"I can hardly tell. It sometimes happens to me all of a sudden to fancy that I shall be supposed to think or feel something I do not a bit think or feel. Then I get red —then I am vexed with myself—then I am afraid of crying—and then, like a fool, I cry."

"Are you thinking of becoming a sister?"

"Well, I have thought of it."

"Really, truly?"

"Yes—if those sisters settle at Bramblemoor."

A dark flash—if the two words can go together—passed over Annie's face. "Oh, you mean, then, to live here—I mean at Bramblemoor?"

"Yes, I think so; I have every reason to wish it."

"Oh!"

"I should like to be near you and Miss Conway, and then I should like to go on working for Mr. Derwent. He has taught me more than any one else has done, and, if I am ever good, I shall owe it to him."

Annie seemed touched. "Well, it is a great thing for any one to have done that for another."

"Yes! Is it not a great thing to help others to be good and happy? Is it not worth any amount of suffering? It is so beautiful to think of what some persons have done in that way, of the sacrifices they have made, of all they have surrendered without counting the cost."

"The Bible says we *are* to count the

cost," Annie answered in a tremulous voice. Perhaps she was even then in the silent depths of her heart counting the cost of a great sacrifice.

A few days afterwards Eliza went to Marchbanks and asked to see Ita. She wanted to know if she had made up her mind about the work among the poor, and the sisterhood at Bramblemoor. She was very much disappointed at her indecision on the subject; it had fitted in so beautifully with all her plans that the little community should settle in the parish where her future husband was to be curate, and eventually incumbent, when Edgar became Vicar of Holmwood, for so it had been arranged between them and Lord Carsdale. The little income which Lady Emily had settled on Ita would have helped to support the house. Everybody knew that she could not live at most more than a few months, and what could be more desirable than that Ita should find a home near her greatest friends, and one in which she could devote herself to the mode of life she had so ardently embraced. What was most to be dreaded was her going abroad and

falling again in the way of Romish influences. It was, therefore, with the fullest intention of exerting to the uttermost her powers of reasoning and persuasion on the subject, that Eliza walked up the stairs leading to Miss Flower's little room. She was welcomed with the usual sweet smile, which was one of the great charms of Ita's face, but it quickly passed away, and the dove-like eyes had an unwonted expression of sadness. Eliza began by talking of the poor people and the school, but nothing seemed to interest her companion. "You are out of spirits," she said at last.

"I do not feel very well."

"What is the matter with you, dear?"

"Nothing particular. People cannot be always in spirits, you know. Mamma is much worse, I think."

"I am so sorry. It must be a great grief to you; but it is a consolation to think that when you lose her, you will have friends around you to comfort and love you."

"I shall be quite alone in the world then. I have never thought that poor mamma cared very much for me; it is wrong perhaps

to say so, for she has always been very kind to me; but, when she is gone, nobody will care for me."

"How can you say so, dear Ita? Mrs. Gerald, Annie, Mr. Hendon, Mr. Derwent, and I *all* care for you."

"I hope not, for then it will make you sorry to part with me."

"But we shall not part with you. Tell me, why have you given up that plan which you used to take so much delight in? Do not you mean to try to be a Sister of Charity, and remain amongst us and the poor people who love you so much?"

"No, I cannot stay here after mamma's death."

"What do you mean to do?"

"I don't know."

Eliza looked annoyed. Suddenly an idea struck her. "Have you seen Mrs. Sydney lately?"

"No," Ita answered with surprise.

"Oh, I thought she had been trying perhaps to unsettle you, and disturb the peace of mind you have found in your own Church."

"She would be quite right to do so, if she thought it was not a real peace."

"But it *was* real."

"Yes, I suppose so. I never had been so happy as during the last few months."

"Why then have you made up your mind to leave this place?"

There was no answer to this question, so Eliza asked again, "Where do you mean to go?"

Ita sighed and said, "To Mentone, I think, to some of my old friends there. I want to see the mountains, and the blue sky, and the sea again. Oh, if I could go and pray at San Michele as I used to do when my heart was sore, in old days!"

"You know very well that you have told me yourself that it is our books and our services that have done you good. It must be a temptation this hankering after a foreign Church."

"Perhaps it is; I do delight—I mean I have taken delight in the services at Bramblemoor, and learnt, oh, so many good things there; but I do not know how it is, when sorrow or difficulty come, I think of Catholic,

Roman Catholic churches, I mean, and feel as I used to do when I was a child, and had a longing to lay my head on a real mother's breast."

"I am so sorry to hear you speak so," Eliza said, sadly; "I hoped you had learnt to love our Church."

"Oh, I do in a sort of way; I do love Bramblemoor Church; but when I go into the one here or at Holmwood it gives me a cold chill."

"But I am speaking of the Church of England."

"It is very well, Eliza, to speak of the Church of England, but the religion at Bramblemoor is not a bit like the religion here; and then I think it is all very inconsistent and wrong, all the talk about priests, and calling clergymen priests, and then that they should marry. They have no business to marry."

Eliza blushed deeply, and Ita immediately perceived that she had vexed her; her gentle little heart could not endure to give pain, and she said, "Dear Lizzie, I am cross to-day with everything and everybody. I cannot

judge of those things. I dare say it is all right. Must you go? Will you not stay for luncheon?"

"No, indeed, I must walk home as fast as I can. There are several families I must see this afternoon."

"Then will you take this parcel with you?"

"To Mr. Derwent? You do not mean to say you have copied those two long articles and written out that sermon since last night?"

"Oh yes."

"But you must have sat up all night?"

"Not all night, Eliza; you know *he* must not write at night; his eyes are very weak."

"I am afraid they are; they do not look so, they are such beautiful eyes, but Annie told me the doctor says he must not overwork them. But you are overworking *yours*. I think I can guess now why you are a little out of sorts to-day. It is all fatigue."

"It does not tire me."

When Eliza was gone, Ita sank back in her chair, her eyes fixed on the ground. She repeated to herself the words, "It does not

tire me;" adding, "but oh! I am so tired since yesterday."

This was what had happened the night before: she was writing in the library, and having occasion to look for a quotation which Edgar had asked her to insert in an article in the "British Critic" which she was copying for him, she asked Mr. Hendon where she could find the book. He went to get it for her, and as he was bringing it back said with a smile, "Do you know what I heard this morning, Miss Ita?"

"No," she said, holding out her hand for the volume.

"That Miss Derwent had better look sharp, for that you are running away with the parson's heart."

Ita did not blush, but turned as pale as a sheet. Was this said in earnest, or was it only a silly joke? Did people think it, and was it true? She did not know what to answer. Everything she could say seemed too grave or too light. She could not repel such a charge with a jest. At last she got out the words, "People say many foolish things."

"Yes," Mr. Hendon answered in a good-natured manner; "no doubt they do; but there is sometimes a grain of truth in a pound of folly, and if you do not mean, my dear little lady, to get yourself and others into trouble, I would have you be on your guard."

It was right to warn her; and, great as the pain was, she could feel and see that it was so. She had been living in a state of delusion—had begun by admiring Edgar Derwent's goodness and his cleverness, and then gradually allowed her whole thoughts, and at last her whole heart, to be engrossed by an unselfish, humble devotion to him which neither expected nor wished for the least return or acknowledgment. Long before she knew him she was aware of his engagement to his cousin, and she could dwell with satisfaction on the thought of Annie's affection for him, and the prospect of his future happiness at Holmwood. There are women with tender and unambitious hearts who would willingly accept very scanty crumbs of happiness for themselves; who, if they could see (so at least they fancy) the object of their

affections now and then, hear a kind word from him, and above all labour and toil in his service, would be quite content to leave to another the higher treasures of mutual affection which they have never ventured to covet. While Ita was working for Edgar, and learning from him, while she paid him the homage of an enthusiastic adoption of his views and opinions, and saw him perfectly satisfied both with Annie and herself, no clouds obscured her secret and innocent devotion to him. They began to arise, though she was hardly conscious of them, when she saw that he began to find in her the sort of sympathy Annie could not give him. This he never, of course, expressed in words, but he could not always conceal that he felt it. The fact was that Ita was the very woman to captivate him. Everything about her was feminine, winning, and soft, but there was a marvellous power of loving in that gentle heart, and an energy of will, which, like the tendrils of a delicate plant, could force its way through every obstacle. When she saw he wished a thing done, it seemed as if nothing could stop her—she went straight at it with a resistless

impetuosity, which a word or a look from him, however, would instantaneously check and direct. It was her delight to execute difficult things when he had suggested them. There was in her character naturally a strong desire to please, and with one whom she looked up to and loved, it easily became a passion. The slightest shade of displeasure or disappointment on his face she could not endure; and it did surprise her to see that Annie *could* thwart him, and *could* say before him things he did not like. She did not know, however, that sometimes afterwards Annie cried bitterly in secret because they did not and could not agree, and often felt a pang which no one knew or guessed at, when she watched Ita listening to him like an oracle, and flushing with excitement when his favourite subjects were discussed.

Annie did not think herself capable of helping her cousin as Ita did. She was profoundly diffident of her own capabilities, and sensitively afraid of putting herself forward. She longed, for instance, to copy for him when she found another did so, but half through pride, half through shyness, she

could not bring herself to offer it. Ita wrote such a good hand, and she knew always where to find the books he wanted. She could not bear to propose to do what she might fail in. It was the same about the poor people, she seemed always to give them more or less than he would have advised. She was not at her ease with them, and sick persons used to ask anxiously, within her hearing, if Miss Flower would soon come to see them.

This had all tacitly been going on for some time, but to not one of the three had any defined discontent, hope, wish, or regret occurred till a few days before the one when Eliza Conway paid the above-mentioned morning visit to Ita. Perhaps Annie was the first who had seen clearly what was the real state of the case. She had looked it in the face, and owned to herself with an aching heart, that she did not suit Edgar, that she was not the wife fitted for him. But there was Holmwood. It must be his. She would have given up all her own happiness, but she could not deprive him of Holmwood, for he was getting to love it every day more. Mr.

Pratt had been getting gradually weaker during the winter, and Edgar had often been called upon to assist his curate. By Mrs. Gerald's express desire he had also begun to manage Annie's property. The interest he took in this occupation gave her the greatest delight. They rode together over the estate, looking at the farms, examining the state of the crops, settling what trees were to be planted or cut down, and what new cottages built. This, at least, was an enjoyment nobody but herself could give him, and on that thought she rested with satisfaction, and also on the hope that when once they were married, and Ita had left the neighbourhood, she would learn to be more useful to Edgar. She should not feel so shy about it when the contrast was no longer before her eyes of her own awkwardness, and another person's efficiency. On hearing, however, in an unexpected manner that she intended to settle down as a Sister of Charity at Bramblemoor, a jealous pang seized her. For a moment she felt indignant. The frank avowal which immediately followed of Ita's gratitude to Edgar, and of her own wish on that account

to remain in the neighbourhood, dispelled her resentment, but not her uneasiness. Both she and Ita were humble each in their way. It was a singular instance in two such different persons of an equally unselfish attachment for the same person. Sometimes, perhaps, it crossed Ita's mind that she could have made Edgar happier than Annie did or ever would do; but she not only recoiled from the idea as from a sin, but felt it would be a misfortune, a terrible misfortune, if he should like her better than his cousin. She could not brook the idea—Holmwood, beautiful Holmwood, before her eyes as before Annie's, ever stood coupled with the thought that it must be his. Till Mr. Hendon made that passing remark to her, she had allowed herself to think that she might live at Bramblemoor, working among Edgar's poor, looking after his school, hearing him preach, sharing his interests, copying his manuscripts, though there would be no more intercourse between him and her than between him and Miss Conway, or any Sunday-school teacher in the parish. She liked the idea of belonging to a sisterhood, because it would

cut her off from all opportunities of meeting him in society. She did not see even the shadow of anything wrong in making him the object of a secret worship, provided neither he, nor Annie, nor any one in the world knew of it. She had not yet learnt the fallacy and the danger of these secret indulgences of unavowed feelings, however pure and unselfish they may be.

But Mr. Hendon's words dispelled the whole fabric of her hopes and her illusions, and threw her into a strange disturbance. Others had seen that Edgar cared for her—perhaps that she cared for him. She felt guilty, miserable, almost as angry as it was in her nature to be; and then an involuntary joy flashed across the gloom. So then, perhaps, he did love her; but if so, there was certain misery in store for him. It could never be a right or a happy love; for he was bound to marry Annie, and she must go away. There was the sting — there the terrible pang—the blank future. A separation for a given time from any one we love is to be borne; but to go where no natural ties give a prescriptive right to hope we shall meet

again—to cast future existence in a new mould which will sever it for ever from the past—this is very like death. And as Lady Emily Hendon grew worse, and the shadows of the grave gathered visibly around her declining form, the young heart that watched that slow decay—the close of which was to be the end of the new life it had lately known—seemed invaded also with the chill heavy gloom of approaching dissolution.

It was a melancholy deathbed. There was in it little regret for anything on earth; but little care or thought of anything beyond it. The flame slowly expired with many a flicker. The man of the world, the man of letters on the one hand, and, on the other, the young girl who scarcely knew how to suggest to a dying person any of the new ideas and principles she had herself recently acquired, watched side by side. No one sent for the clergyman; it was not much the custom to do so when Mr. Hendon and Lady Emily were young. "To keep her quiet," was the doctor's injunction; and quietly as she had lived, so quietly she died. Mr. Hendon, when she had breathed her last,

said, "*Requiescat in pace.*" He was one of those men who have had glimpses of Catholic truth, theoretic perceptions of the beauty of the Church, poetical sympathies with some of her tenets, and who suppose that if there is any true religion it must be Catholicism. And so he breathed that prayer by the remains of poor Lady Emily, and comforted, as well as he could, the weeping girl who had lost her only friend.

END OF FIRST VOLUME.

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